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JUNE



MEWHU'S JET

BY THEODORE STURGEON

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Vol. V, No. 10 (British Edition)

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Contents

Novelettes

MEWHU'S JET Theodore Sturgeon 2

HOBBIES Clifford D. Simak 26

TROUBLE George O. Smith 52

Short Stories

THE UNFORESEEN Mark Champion 20

TOWER OF DARKNESS A. Bertram Chandler 42

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

MEWHU'S JET

By THEODORE STURGEON

Mewhu came from—somewhere. He wrecked his spaceship on landing, but the "parachute" he had was something decidedly super—an atomic jet job! The problem was to get into communication—they thought.

"We interrupt this program to announce—"

"Jack! Don't jump like that! And you've dropped ashes all over your—"

"Aw, Iris, honey, let me listen to—"

"—at first identified as a comet, the object is pursuing an erratic course through the stratosphere, occasionally dipping as low as—"

"You make me nervous, Jack! You're an absolute slave to the radio. I wish you paid that much attention to me."

"Darling, I'll argue the point, or pay attention to you, or anything in the wide world you like when I've heard this announcement; but please, please LET ME LISTEN!"

"—dents of the East Coast are warned to watch for the approach of this ob—"

"Iris, don't—"

Click!

"Well, of all the selfish, inconsiderate, discourteous—"

"That will do, Jack Garry! It's my radio as much as yours, and I have a right to turn it off when I want to!"

"Might I ask why you find it necessary to turn it off at this moment?"

"Because I know the announcement will be repeated any number of times if it's important, and you'll shush me every time. Because I'm not interested in that kind of thing and don't see why I should have it rammed down my throat. Because the only thing you ever want to listen to is something which couldn't possibly affect us. But mostly because you YELLED at me!"

"I did NOT yell at you!"

"You did! And you're yelling NOW!"

"MOM! DADDY!"

"Oh, Molly, darling, we woke you up!"

"Poor bratlet. Hey—what about your slippers?"

"It isn't cold tonight, Daddy. What was that on the radio?"

"Something buzzing around in the sky, darling, I didn't hear it all."

"A spaceship, I betcha."

"You see? You and your so-called science-fiction!"

"Call us a science-faction. The kid's got more judgment than you have."

"You have as little judgment as a seven-year-old child, you mean. And besides, you're turning her a-against me!"

"Aw, for Pete's sake, Mom, don't cry!"

At which point, something like a giant's fist clouted off the two-room top story of the seaside cottage and scattered it down the beach. The lights winked out, and outside, the whole waterfront lit up with a brief, shattering blue glare.

"Jacky, darling, are you hurt?"

"Mom, he's bleedin'!"

"Jack, honey, say something. Please say something."

"Urrrrgh," said Jack Garry obediently, sitting up with a soft clatter of pieces of falling lath and plaster. He put his hands gently on the sides of his head and whistled. "Something hit the house."

His red-headed wife laughed half-hysterically. "Not really, darling." She put her arms around him, whisked some dust out of his hair, and began stroking his neck. "I'm . . . frightened, Jack."

"You're frightened!" He looked around, shakily, in the dim moonlight that filtered in. Radiance from an unfamiliar place caught his bleary gaze, and he clutched Iris' arm. "Upstairs . . . it's gone!" he said hoarsely, struggling to his feet. "Molly's room . . . Molly—"

"I'm here, Daddy. Hey! You're squeezin'!"

"Happy little family," said Iris, her voice trembling. "Vacationing in a quiet little cottage by the sea, so Daddy can write technical articles while Mummy regains her good disposition—without a phone, without movies within miles, and



living in a place where the roof flies away. Jack—what hit us?"

"One of those things you were talking about," said Jack sardonically. "One of the things you refuse to be interested in, that couldn't possibly affect us. Remember?"

"The thing the radio was talking about?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. We'd better get out of here. This place may fall in on us, or burn, or something."

"An' we'll all be kilt," crooned Molly.

"Shut up, Molly! Iris, I'm going to poke around. Better go on out and pick us a place to pitch the tent—if I can find the tent."

"Tent?" Iris gasped.

"Boy oh boy," said Molly.

"Jack Garry, I'm not going to go to bed in a tent. Do you realize that this place will be swarming with people in no time flat?"

"O.K.—O.K. Only get out from under what's left of the house. Go for a swim. Take a walk. Or g'wan to bed in Molly's room, if you can find it. Iris, you can pick the oddest times to argue!"

"I'm not going out there by myself!"

Jack sighed. "I should've asked you to stay in here," he muttered. "If you're not the contrariest woman ever to— Be quiet, Molly!"

"I didn't say anything."

Meeew-w-w!

"Aren't you doing that caterwauling?"

"No, Daddy, truly."

Iris said, "I'd say a cat was caught in the wreckage except that cats are smart and no cat would ever come near this place."

Wuh-wuh-muh-meeeee-ew-w-w!

"What a dismal sound!"

"Jack, that isn't a cat."

"Well, stop shaking like the well-known aspen leaf."

Molly said, "Not without aspen Daddy's leaf to do it."

"Molly! You're too young to make bad puns!"

"Sorry, Daddy. I fergot."

Mmmmmew. Mmm—m-m-m...

"Whatever it is," Jack said, "it can't be big enough to be afraid of and make a funny little noise like that." He squeezed Iris' arm and, stepping carefully over the rubble, began peering in and around it. Molly scrambled beside him. He was about to caution her against making so much noise, and then thought better of it. What difference would a little racket make?

The noise was not repeated, and five minutes' searching elicited nothing. Garry went back to his wife, who was fumbling around the shambles of a living room, pointlessly setting chairs and coffee tables back on their legs.

"I didn't find anyth—"

"YIPE!"

"Molly! What is it?"

Molly was just outside, in the shrubbery. "Oh . . . oh— Daddy, you better come quick!"

Spurred by the urgency of her tone, he went crashing outside. He found Molly standing rigid, trying to cram both her fists in her mouth at the same time. And at her feet was a man with a silver-gray skin and a broken arm, who mewed at him.

"—Guard and Navy Department have withdrawn their warnings. The pilot of a Pan American transport has reported that the object disappeared into the zenith. It was last seen eighteen miles east of Normandy Beach, New Jersey. Reports from the vicinity describe it as traveling very slowly, with a hissing noise. Although it reached within a few feet of the ground several times, no danger has been reported. Inves—"

"Think of that," said Iris, switching off the little three-way portable. "No damage."

"Yeah. And if no one saw the thing hit, no one will be out here to investigate. So you can retire to your downy couch in the tent without fear of being interviewed."

"Go to sleep? Are you mad? Sleep in that flimsy tent with that mewing monster lying there?"

"Oh heck, Mom, he's sick! He wouldn't hurt anybody."

They sat around a cheerful fire, fed by roof shingles. Jack had set up the tent without much trouble. The silver-gray man was stretched out in the shadows, sleeping lightly and emitting an occasional moan.

Jack smiled at Iris. "Y'know, I love your silly chatter, darling. The way you turned to and set his arm was a pleasure to watch. You didn't think of him as a monster while you were tending to him."

"Didn't I, though? Maybe 'monster' was the wrong word to use. Jack, he has only one bone in his forearm!"

"He has what? Oh, nonsense, honey! 'Tain't scientific. He'd have to have a ball-and-socket joint in his wrist."

"He has a ball-and-socket joint in his wrist."

"This I have to see," Jack muttered. He picked up a flash lantern and went over to the lone mone figure.

Silver eyes blinked up at the light. There was something queer about them. He turned the beam closer. The pupils were not black in that light, but dark green. They all but closed—from the sides, like a cat's. Jack's breath wheezed out. He ran the light over the man's body. It was clad in a bright-blue roomy bathroom effect, with a yellow sash. The

sash had a buckle which apparently consisted of two pieces of yellow metal placed together; there seemed to be nothing to keep them together. They just stayed. When the man had fainted, just as they found him, it had taken almost all Jack's strength to pull them apart.

"Iris."

She got up and came over to him. "Let the poor devil sleep."

"Iris—what color was his robe?"

"Red, with a . . . but it's blue!"

"Is now. Iris, what on earth have we got here?"

"I don't know. I don't know. Some poor thing that escaped from an institution for . . . for—"

"For what?"

"How should I know?" she snapped.

"There must be some place where they send creatures that get born like that."

"Creatures don't get born like that. Iris, he isn't deformed. He's just different."

"I see what you mean. I don't know why I see what you mean, but I'll tell you something." She stopped, and was quiet for so long that he turned to her, surprised. She said slowly, "I ought to be afraid of him, because he's strange, and ugly, but—I'm not."

"Me, too."

"Molly, go back to bed!"

"He's a lenrechaun."

"Maybe you're right. Go on to bed, chicken, and in the morning you can ask him where he keeps his crock of gold."

"Gee." She went off a little way then stood on one foot, drawing a small circle in the sand with the other. "Daddy."

"Yes, Molly-m'love."

"Can I sleep in the tent tomorrow, too?"

"If you're good."

"Daddy obviously means," said Iris acidly, "that if you're not good he'll have a roof on the house by tomorrow night."

"I'll be good." She disappeared into the tent.

"For kids," Jack said admiringly, "it never rains tomorrow."

The gray man mewed.

"Well, old guy, what is it?"

The man reached over and fumbled at his slitted arm.

"It hurts him," said Iris. She knelt beside him and, taking the wrist of his good arm, lifted it away from the slint, where he was clawing. The man did not resist, but lay and looked at her with pain-filled, slitted eyes.

"He has six fingers," Jack said. "See?" He knelt beside his wife and gently took the mao's wrist. He whistled. "It is a hail and socket."

"Give him some aspirin."

"That's a good . . . wait." Jack stood pulling his lip in puzzlement. "Do you think we should?"

"Why oot?"

"We doo't know where he comes from. We know oothing of his body chemistry, or what any of our medicines might do to him."

"He . . . what do you mean, where he comes from?"

"Iris, will you opeo up your miod just a little? In the face of evidence like this, are you goiing to even attempt to cling to the idea that this mao comes from anywhere oo this earth?" Jack said with annoyance. "You know your anatomy. Doo't tell me you ever saw a humao freak with skin and bones like that! That belt huckle—that material in his clothes . . . come on, oow. Drop your prejudices and give your braios a chaoce, will you?"

"You're suggestiing things that simply don't happen!"

"That's what the man in the street said—in Hiroshima. That's what the old-time airocoat said from the basket of his balloon when they told him about heavier-than-air craft. That's what—"

"All right, all right, Jack! I know the rest of the speech. If you want dialectics instead of what's left of a night's sleep, I might point out that the thiings you have mentiooced have all concerned humao endeavors. Show me any oew plastic, a new metal, a new kind of engine, and though I may not begio to understand it, I can accept it because it is of humao oriein. But this . . . this man, or whatever he is—"

"I know," said Jack, more gently. "It's frightening because it's strange, and away down uoderneath we feel that anything strange is necessarily dangerous. That's why we wear our best manners for strangers and not for our friends—but I still don't think we should give this character anv asprin."

"He seems to breathe the same air we do. He perspires, he talks . . . I think he talks—"

"You have a point. Well, if it'll ease his pain at all, it may be worth trying. Give him just one."

Iris went to the pump with a collapsible cup from her first-aid kit, and filled it. Koeceling hy the silver-skinned mao, she propped up his head, geotly put the

aspirin between his lips, and brougnt the cup to his mouth. He sucked the water in greedily, and theo went completely limp.

"Oh, oh. I was afraid of that."

Iris put her haod over the man's heart. "Jack!"

"Is he . . . what is it, Iris?"

"Not dead, if that's what you mean. Will you feel this?"

Jack put his haod beside Iris'. The heart was beating with massive, slow blows, about eight to the minute. Under it, out of phase completely with the main beat, was another, an extremely fast, sharp beat, which felt as if it were going about three hundred.

"He's having some sort of palpitation," Jack said.

"Aod in two hearts at oncel!"

Suddeoly the mao raised his head and uttered a series of ululating shrieks and howls. His eyes opeocd wide, and across them fluttered a translucent oicitating membrane. He lay perfectly still with his mouth open, shrieking and gurgling. Then, with a lightniog movement, he snatched Jack's hand to his mouth. A pointed toogee, light-orange and four inches looger than it had aoy right to be, flicked out and licked Jack's hand. Theo the strange eyes closed, the shrieks died to a whimper and faded out, and the man relaxed.

"Sleeping now," said Iris. "Oh, I hope we haveo't dooe anything to him!"

"We've dooe something. I just hope it isn't serious. Aoyhow, his arm isn't bothering him any. That's all we were worried about in the first place."

Iris put a cushioo under the man's oddly planed head, touched the beach mattress he was lying on to see that he would be comfortable. "He has a beautiful mustache," she said. "Like silver. He looks very old and wise, doesn't he?"

"So does ao owl. Let's go to hed."

Jack woke early, from a dream in which he had hailed out of a flying motor-cycle with an umbrella that turned into a candy cane as he fell. He landed in the middle of some sharp-toothed crags which gave like sponge rubber. He was immediately surrounded by mermaids who looked like Iris and who had hands shaped like spur gears. But nothing frightened him. He awoke smiling, inordinately happy.

Iris was still asleep. Outside, somewhere, he heard the tinkle of Molly's laugh. He sat up, looked at Molly's camp cot. It was empty.

Moving quietly, so as not to disturb his wife, he slid his feet into moccasins and went out.

Molly was on her knees beside their strange visitor, who was squatting on his haunches and—

"They were playing patty-cake.

"Molly!"

"Yes, Daddy."

"What are you trying to do? Don't you realize that that man has a broken arm?"

"Oh, gosh, I'm sorry. Do you s'pose I hurt him?"

"I don't know. It's very possible," said Jack Garry testily. He went to the alien, took his good hand.

The man looked up at him and smiled. His smile was peculiarly engaging. All of his teeth were pointed, and they were very widely spaced. "Eee-yu mow madibu Mewhu," he said.

"That's his name," Molly said excitedly. She leaned forward and tugged at the man's sleeve. "Mewhu. Hey, Mewhu!" And she pointed at her chest.

"Mooly," said Mewhu. "Mooly—Geery."

"See, Daddy?" Molly said ecstatically. "See?" She pointed at her father. "Daddy.

Dah—dee."

"Deedy," said Mewhu.

"No, silly! Daddy."

"Dewdy."

"Dah-dy!"

Jack, quite entranced, pointed at himself and said, "Jack."

"Jeek."

"Good enough. Molly, the man can't say 'ah.' He can say 'oo' or 'ee' but not 'ah.' That's good enough."

Jack examined the splints. Iris had done a very competent job. When she realized that instead of the radius-ulna development of a true human, Mewhu had only one bone in his forearm, she had set the arm and laid on two splints instead of one. Jack grinned. Intellectually, Iris would not accept Mewhu's existence even as a possibility; but as a nurse, she not only accepted his body structure but skillfully compensated for its differences.

"I guess he wants to be polite," said Jack to his repentant daughter, "and if you want to play patty-cake, he'll go along with you, even if it hurts. Don't take advantage of him, chicken."

"I won't, Daddy."

Jack started up the fire and had a green-stick crane built and hot water bubbling by the time Iris emerged. "Takes a cataclysm to get you to start breakfast,"

she grumbled through a pleased smile. "When were you a boy scout?"

"Matter of fact," said Garry, "I was once. Will Modom now take over?"

"Modom will. How's the patient?"

"Thriving. He and Molly had a patty-cake tournament this morning. His clothes, by the way, are red again."

"Jack—where does he come from?"

"I haven't asked him yet. When I learn to caterwaul, or he learns to talk, perhaps we'll find out. Molly has already elicited the information that his name's Mewhu." Garry grinned. "And he calls me 'Jeek.'"

"Can't pronounce an 'r,' hm?"

"That'll do woman. Get on with the breakfast."

While Iris busied herself over breakfast, Jack went to look at the house. It wasn't as bad as he had thought—a credit to poor construction. Apparently the upper two rooms were a late addition and had just been perched onto the older, comparatively flat-topped lower section. The frame of Molly's bed was bent beyond repair, but the box spring and mattress were intact. The old roof seemed fairly sound, where the removal of the jerry-built little top story had exposed it. The living room would be big enough for him and Iris, and Molly's bed could be set up in the study. There were tools and lumber in the garage, the weather was warm and clear, and like any other writer, Jack Garry was very much attracted by the prospect of hard work for which he would not get paid, as long as it wasn't writing. By the time Iris called him for breakfast, he had most of the debris cleared from the roof and a plan of action mapped out. It would only be necessary to cover the hole where the stairway landing had been, and go over the roof for potential leaks. A good rain, he reflected, would search those out for him quickly enough.

"What about Mewhu?" Iris asked as she handed him an aromatic plate of eggs and bacon. "If we feed him any of this, do you think he'll throw another fit?"

Jack looked at their visitor, who sat on the other side of the fire, very close to Molly, gazing big-eyed at their breakfasts.

"I don't know. We could give him a little, I suppose."

Mewhu inhaled his sample, and waited for more. He ate a second helping, and when Iris refused to fry more eggs, he gobbled toast and jam. Each new thing he tasted he would nibble at, blink twice, and then bolt down. The only exception was the coffee. One taste was sufficient.

He put it down on the ground and very carefully, very delicately overturned it.

"Can you talk to him?" Iris asked suddenly.

"He can talk to me," declared Molly.

"I've heard him," Jack said.

"Oh, no. I don't mean *that*," Molly denied vehemently. "I can't make any sense out of that stuff."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I . . . I dunno, Mommy. He just—talks to me, that's all."

Jack and Iris looked at each other. "Must be a game," said Iris. Jack shook his head, looking at his daughter carefully as if he had not really seen her before. He could think of nothing to say, and rose.

"Thina, the house can be patched up?"

"Oh sure." He laughed. "You never did like the color of the upstairs rooms, anyway."

I don't know what's gotten into me," said Iris thoughtfully. "I'd have kicked like a mule at any part of this. I'd have packed up and gone home if, say, just a wall was gone upstairs, or if there were just a hole in the roof, or if this . . . this android phenomenon arrived suddenly. But when it all happens at once—I can take it all!"

"Question of perspective. Show me a nagging woman and I'll show you one who hasn't enough to worry about."

"You'll get out of my sight or you'll have this frying pan bounced off your yammering skull," said Iris steadily. Jack got.

Molly and Mewhu trailed after him as he returned to the house, stood side by side goggling at him as he mounted the ladder.

"Whatsha doing, Daddy?"

"Marking off the edges of this hole where the stairway hits the place where the roof isn't, so I can clean up the edges with a saw."

"Oh."

Jack roughed out the area with a piece of charcoal, lopped off the more manageable rough edges with a hatchet, cast about for his saw. It was still in the garage. He climbed down, got it, climbed up again, and began to saw. Twenty minutes of this, and sweat was streaming down his face. He knocked off, climbed down, doused his head at the pump, lit a cigarette, climbed back up on the roof.

"Why don't you jump off and back?"

The roofing job was looking larger and the day seemed warmer than it had. Jack's

enthusiasm was in inverse proportion to these factors. "Don't be funny, Molly."

"Yes, but Mewhu wants to know."

"Oh, he does. Ask him to try it."

He went back to work. A few minutes later, when he paused for a breath, Mewhu and Molly were nowhere to be seen. Probably over by the tent, in Iris' hair, he thought, and went on sawing.

"Daddy!"

Daddy's unaccustomed arm and shoulder were, by this time, yelling for help. The dry soft-wood alternately cheesed the saw out of line and bound it. He answered impatiently, "Well, what?"

"Mewhu says to come. He wants to show you something."

"Show me what? I haven't time to play now, Molly. I'll attend to Mewhu when we get a roof over our heads again."

"But it's for you!"

"What is?"

"The thing in the tree."

"Oh, all right." Prompted more by laziness than by curiosity, Jack climbed back down the ladder. Molly was waiting. Mewhu was not in sight.

"Where is he?"

"By the tree," she said with exaggerated patience, taking his hand. "Come on. It's not far."

She led him around the house and across the bumpy track that was euphemistically known as a road. There was a tree down on the other side. He looked from it to the house, saw that in line with the felled tree and his damaged roof were more broken trees, where something had come down out of the sky, skimmed the tops of the trees, angling closer to the ground until it wiped the top off his house and had then risen up and up—to where?

They went deeper into the woods for ten minutes, skirting an occasional branch or fallen treetop, until they came to Mewhu, who was leaning against a young maple. He smiled, pointed up into the tree, pointed to his arm, to the ground. Jack looked at him in puzzlement.

"He fell out of the tree and broke his arm," said Molly.

"How do you know?"

"Well, he just did, Daddy."

"Nice to know. Now can I get back to work?"

"He wants you to get the thing in the tree?"

Jack looked upward. Hung on a fork two-thirds of the way up the tree was a gleaming object, a stick about five feet long with a streamlined shape on each

end, rather like the wingtip tanks of a P-80. "What on earth is that?"

"I dunno. I can't— He tol' me, but I dunno. Anyway, it's for you, so you don't . . . so you don't—" She looked at Mewhu for a moment. The alien's silver mustache seemed to swell a little. "—so you don't have to climb the ladder so much."

"Molly—how did you know that?"

"He told me, that's all. Gosh, Daddy, don't be mad. I don't know how, honest; he just did, that's all."

"I don't get it," muttered Jack. "Anyhow—what's this about that thing in the tree? I'm supposed to break my arm too?"

"It isn't dark."

"What do you mean by that?"

Molly shrugged. "Ask him."

"Oh. I think I catch that. He fell out of the tree because it was dark. He thinks I can get up there and get the whatzit without hurting myself because I can see what I am doing. He also flatters me. Or is it flattery? How close to the apes does he think we are?"

"What are you talking about, Daddy?"

"Never mind . . . why am I supposed to get that thing, anyway?"

"Uh—so's you can jump off the roof."

"That is just silly. However, I do want a look at that thing. Since his ship is gone, that object up there seems to be the only artifact he brought with him except his clothes."

"What's an artifact?"

"Second cousin to an artichoke. Here goes nothin'," and he swung up into the tree. He had not climbed a tree for years, and as he carefully chose his way, it occurred to him that there were probably more efficient ways of gaining altitude. An escalator, for example. Why didn't escalators grow on trees?

The tree began to shiver and sway with his weight. He looked down once and decided instantly not to do it again. He looked up and was gratified to see how close he was to the object he was after. He pulled himself up another three feet and was horrified at how far away it was, for the branches were very small up here. He squirmed upward, reached, and his fingers just brushed against the shank of the thing. It had two rings fastened to it, he noticed, one each side of the center, large enough to get an arm through. It was one of these which was hung up on a branch. He chinned himself, then, with his unpracticed muscles cracking, took one hand off and reached.

The one-hand chinning didn't come off so well. His arm began to sag. The ring broke off its branch as his weight came on it. He was immediately surrounded by the enthusiastic crackling of breaking shrubbery. He folded his tongue over and got his teeth on it. Since he had a grip on Mewhu's artifact, he held on . . . even when it came free. He began to fall, tensed himself for the bone-breaking jolt he would get at the bottom.

He didn't get it.

He fell quite fast at first, and then the stick he was holding began to bear him up. He thought that it must have caught on a branch, by some miracle—but it hadn't! He was drifting down like a thistle seed, hanging from the rod, which in some impossible fashion was supporting itself in midair. There was a shrill, faint *whooshing* sound from the two streamlined fixtures at the ends of the rod. He looked down, blinked sweat out of his eyes, looked again. Mewhu was grinning a broad and happy grin, and Molly was slack-jawed with astonishment.

The closer he came to the ground the slower he went. When, after what seemed an eternity, he felt the blessed pressure of earth under his feet, he had to stand and *pull* the rod down. It yielded slowly, like an eddy current brake. Dry leaves danced and whirled under the end pieces.

"Gee, Daddy, that was wonderful!"

He swallowed twice to wet down his dry esophagus, and pulled his eyes back in. "Yeah. Fun," he said weakly.

Mewhu came and took the rod out of his hand, and dropped it. It stayed perfectly horizontal, and sank slowly down to the ground, where it lay. Mewhu pointed at it, at the tree, and grinned.

"Just like a parachute. Oh, gee, Daddy!"

"You keep away from it," said Jack, familiar with youthful intonation. "Heaven knows what it is. It might go off, or something."

He looked fearfully at the object. It lay quietly, the hissing of the end pieces stilled. Mewhu bent suddenly and picked it up, held it over his head with one hand. Then he calmly lifted his feet and hung from it. It lowered him gently, butt first, until he sat on the ground, in a welter of dead leaves; for as soon as he picked it up, the streamlined end pieces had begun to blast again.

"That's the silliest thing I ever saw. Here—let me see it." It was hovering about waist-high. He leaned over one of the ends. It had a fine round grille over

it. He put out a hand. Mewhu reached out and caught his wrist, shaking his head. Apparently it was dangerous to go too near those ends. Garry suddenly saw why. They were tiny, powerful jet motors of some kind. If the jet was powerful enough to support a man's weight, the intake must be drawing like mad—probably enough to snap a hole through a man's hand like a giant ticket-puncher.

But what controlled it? How was the jet strength adjusted to the weight borne by the device, and to the altitude? He remembered without pleasure that when he had fallen with it from the treetop, he had dropped quite fast, and that he went slower and slower as he approached the ground. And yet when Mewhu had held it over his head, it had borne his weight instantly and lowered him very slowly. And besides—how was it so stable? Why didn't it turn upside down and blast itself and passenger down to earth?

He looked at Mewhu with some increase of awe. Obviously he came from a place where the science was really advanced. He wondered if he would ever be able to get any technical information from his visitor—and if he would be able to understand it. Of course, Molly seemed to be able to—

"He wants you to take it back and try it on the roof," said Molly.

"How can that refugee from a Kuttner opus help me?"

Immediately Mewhu took the rod, lifted it, ducked under it, and slipped his arms through the two rings, so that it crossed his back like a water-bucket yoke. Peering around, he turned to face a clearing of trees, and before their startled eyes, he leaped thirty feet in the air, drifted away in a great arc, and came gently to rest twenty yards away.

Molly jumped up and down and clapped her hands, speechless with delight. The only words Garry could find were a reiterated, "Ah, no!"

Mewhu stood where he was, smiling his engaging smile, waiting for them. They walked toward him, and when they were close, he leaped again and soared out toward the road.

"What do you do with a thing like this?" breathed Jack. "Who do you go to, and what do you say to him?"

"Let's just keep him for a pet, Daddy."

Jack took her hand, and they followed the bounding, soaring silver man. A pet! A member of some alien race, from some unthinkable civilization—and obviously a highly trained individual, too, for no

"man in the street" would have made such a trip. What was his story? Was he the sole survivor of his people? How far had he come? Mars? Venus?

They caught up with him at the house. He was standing by the ladder. His strange rod was lying quiet on the ground. He was fascinatedly operating Molly's yo-yo. When he saw them, he threw down the yo-yo, picked up his device, and slipping it across his shoulders, sprang high in the air and drifted down to the roof. "Eee-yu!" he said, with emphasis, and jumped off backward. So stable was the rod that, as he sank through the air, his long body swung to and fro.

"Very nice," said Jack. "Also spectacular. And I have to go back to work." He went to the ladder.

Mewhu bounded over to him, caught his arm, whimpering and whistling in his peculiar speech. He took the rod and extended it toward Jack.

"He wants you to use it," said Molly.

"No, thanks," said Jack, a trace of his tree-climbing vertigo returning to him. "I'd just as soon use the ladder." And he put his hand out to it.

Mewhu, hopping with frustration, reached past him and toppled the ladder. It levered over a box as it fell and struck Jack painfully on the shin.

"I guess you better use the flyin' belt, Daddy."

Jack looked at Mewhu. The silver man was looking as pleasant as he could with that kind of a face; on the other hand, it might just possibly be wise to humor him a little. Being safely on the ground to begin with, Jack felt that it might not matter if the fantastic thing wouldn't work for him. And if it failed him over the roof—well, the house wasn't very tall.

He shrugged his arms through the two rings. Mewhu pointed to the roof, to Jack, made a jumping motion. Jack took a deep breath, aimed carefully, and, hoping the gadget wouldn't work—jumped.

He shot up close to the house—too close. The eave caught him a resounding thwack on precisely the spot where the ladder had just hit him. The impact barely checked him. He went sailing up over the roof, hovered for a breathless second, and then began to come down. For a moment he thought his flailing legs would find purchase on the far edge of the roof. He just missed it. All he managed to do was to crack the same shin, in the same place, mightily on the other eave. Trailing clouds of profanity, he landed standing—in Iris' wash basket. Iris, just turning from the clothes line, confronted him.

"Jack! What on earth are you . . . get out of that! You're standing right on my wash with your dirty . . . oh!"

"Oh oh!" said Jack, and stepped backward out of the wash basket. His foot went into Molly's express wagon, which Iris used to carry the heavy basket. To get his balance, he leaped—and immediately rose high in the air. This time his luck was better. He soared completely over the kitchen wing of the house and came to earth near Molly and Mewhu.

"Daddy, you were just like a bird!"

"I'm going to be just like a corpse if your mother's expression means what I think it does." He shucked off the "flyin' belt" and dove into the house just as Iris rounded the corner. He heard Molly's delighted "He went *that* way" as he plowed through the shambles of the living room and out the front door. As the kitchen door slammed he was rounding the house. He charged up to Mewhu, snatched the gadget from him, slipped it on and jumped. This time his judgment was faultless. He cleared the house easily although he came very near landing astride the clothes line. When Iris, panting and furious, stormed out of the house, he was busily hanging sheets.

"Just what," said Iris, her voice crackling at the seams, "do you think you're doing?"

"Just giving you a hand with the laundry, m'love," said Jack.

"What is that . . . that object on your back?"

"Another evidence of the ubiquity of the devices of science-fiction," said Jack blandly. "This is a multilateral, three-dimensional mass adjuster, or pogochute. With it I can fly like a gull, evading the cares of the world and the advances of beautiful redheads, at such times as their passions are distasteful to me."

"Sometime in the very near future, you gangling hatrack, I am going to pull the tongue out of your juke box of a head and tie a bowknot in it." Then she laughed.

He heaved a sigh of relief, went and kissed her. "Darling, I am sorry. I was scared silly, dangling from this thing. I didn't see your clothes basket, and if I had I don't know how I'd have steered clear."

"What is it, Jack? How does it work?"

"I dunno. Jets on the ends. They blast hard when there's a lot of weight pushing them toward the earth. They blast harder near the ear than up high. When the

weight on them slacks off a bit, they throttle down. What makes them do it, what they are using for power—I just wouldn't know. As far as I can see, they suck in air at the top and blow it out through the jets. And, oh yes—they point directly downward no matter which way the rod is turned."

"Where did you get it?"

"Off a tree. It's Mewhu's. Apparently he used it for a parachute. On the way down, a tree branch speared through one of these rings and he slipped out of it and fell and broke his arm."

"What are we going to do with him, Jack?"

"I've been worrying about that myself. We can't sell him to a sideshow." He paused, thoughtfully. "There's no doubt that he has a lot that would be of value to humanity. Why—this thing alone would change the face of the earth! Listen—I weigh a hundred and seventy. I *fell* on this thing, suddenly, when I lost my grip on a tree, and it bore my weight immediately. Mewhu weighs more than I do, judging from his build. It took his weight when he lifted his feet off the ground while holding it over his head. If it can do that, it or a larger version should be able, not only to drive, but to support an aircraft. If for some reason that isn't possible, the power of those little jets certainly could turn a turbine."

"Will it wash clothes?" Iris was glum.

"That's exactly what I mean! Light, portable, and more power than it has any right to have—of *course* it'll wash clothes. And drive generators, and cars, and . . . Iris, what do you do when you have something as big as this?"

"Call a newspaper, I guess."

"And have a hundred thousand people peeking and prying all over the place, and Congressional investigations, and what all? Uh . . . uh!"

"Why not ask Harry Zinsser?"

"Harry? I thought you didn't like him."

"I never said that. It's just that you and he go off in the corner and chatter about multipitude amputation and debilities of reactance and things like that, and I have to sit, knit—and spit when I want someone's attention. Harry's all right."

"Gosh, honey, you've got it! Harry'll know what to do. I'll go right away."

"You'll do nothing of the kind! With that hole in the roof? I thought you said you could have it patched up for the night at least. By the time you get back here it'll be dark."

The prospect of sawing out the ragged hole in the roof was suddenly the least appealing thing in the world. But there was logic and an "or else" tone to what she said. He sighed and went off, mumbling something about the greatest single advance in history awaiting the whim of a woman. He forgot he was wearing Mewhu's armpit altitudinizer, and only his first two paces were on the ground. Iris hooted with laughter at his clumsy walking on air. When he reached the ground, he set his jaw and leaped lightly up to the roof. "Catch me now, you and your piano legs," he taunted cheerfully, ducked the lancelike clothes prop she hurled at him, and went back to work.

As he sawed, he was conscious of a hubbub down below.

"Dah—dee! "Mr-r-roo ellue—"

He sighed and put down the saw. "What is it?"

"Mewhu wants his flyin' belt!"

Jack looked at the roof, at the lower shed, and decided that his old bones could stand it if he had to get down without a ladder. He took the jet-tipped rod and dropped it. It stayed perfectly horizontal, falling no slower and no faster than it had when he had ridden it down. Mewhu caught it, deftly slipped his splinted arm through it—it was astonishing how careful he was of the arm, and yet how little it inconvenienced him—then the other arm, and sprang up to join Jack on the roof.

"What do you say, fella?"

"Wooopen yew weep."

"I know how you feel." He knew that the silver man wanted to tell him something, but couldn't help him out. He grinned and picked up the saw. Mewhu took it out of his hand and tossed it off the roof, being careful to miss Molly, who was dancing back to get a point of vantage.

"What's the big idea?"

"Dellihew hidden," said Mewhu. Pento de numinew heh," and he pointed at the flyin' belt and at the hole in the roof.

"You mean I'd rather fly off in that thing than work? Brother, you got it. But I'm afraid I have to—"

Mewhu circled his arm, pointing all around the hole in the roof, and pointed again to the pogo-chute, indicating one of the jet motors.

"I don't get it," said Jack.

Mewhu apparently understood, and an expression of amazement crossed his mobile face. Kneeling, he placed his

good hand around one of the little jet motors, pressed two tiny studs, and the casing popped open. Inside was a compact, sealed, and simple-looking device, the core of the motor itself, apparently. There seemed to be no other fastening. Mewhu lifted it out and handed it to Jack. It was about the size and shape of an electric razor. There was a button on the side. Mewhu pointed at it, pressed the back; and then moved Jack's hand so that the device was pointed away from them both. Jack, expecting anything, from nothing at all to the "blinding bolt of searing, raw energy" so dear to the science-fiction world, pressed the button.

The gadget hissed, and snuggled back into his palm in an easy recoil.

"That's fine," said Jack, "but what do I do with it?"

Mewhu pointed at Jack's saw cut, then at the device.

"Oh," said Jack. He bent close, aimed the thing at the end of the saw cut, and pressed the button. Again the hiss, and the slight, steady recoil; and a fine line appeared in the wood. It was a cut, about half as thick as the saw cut, clean and even and, as long as he kept his hand steady, very straight. A fine cloud of pulverized wood rose out of the hole in the roof, carried on a swirl of air.

Jack experimented, holding the jet close to the wood and away from it. He found that it cut finer the closer he got to it. As he drew it away from the wood, the slot got wider and the device cut slower until at about eighteen inches it would not cut at all. Delighted, Jack quickly cut and trimmed the hole. Mewhu watched grinning. Jack grinned back, knowing how he would feel if he introduced a saw to some primitive who was trying to work wood with a machete.

When he was finished, he handed the jet back to the silver man, and slapped his shoulder. "Thanks a million, Mewhu."

"Jeek," said Mewhu, and reached for Jack's neck. One of his thumbs lay on Jack's collarbone, the other on his back, over the scapula. Mewhu squeezed twice, firmly.

"That the way you shake hands back home?" smiled Jack. He thought it likely. Any civilized race was likely to have a manual greeting. The handshake evolved from a raised palm, indicating that the saluter was unarmed. It was quite possible that this was an extension, in a slightly different direction, of the same sign. It would indeed be an indication of friendliness to have two individuals present their throats, each to the other.

Mewhu, with three deft motions, slipped the tiny jet back into its casing, and holding the rod with one hand, stepped off the roof, letting himself be lowered in that amazing thistle-down fashion to the ground. Once there, he tossed the rod back. Jack was startled to see it hurtle upward like any earthly object. He grabbed it and missed. It reached the top of its arc, and as soon as it started down again the jets cut in, and it sank easily to him. He put it on and floated down to join Mewhu.

The silver man followed him to the garage, where he kept a few pieces of milled lumber. He selected some one-inch pine boards and dragged them out, to measure them and mark them off to the size he wanted to knock together a simple trandoor covering for the useless stair well; a process which Mewhu watched with great interest.

Jack took up the flying belt and tried to open the streamlined shell to remove the cutter. It absolutely defied him. He pressed, twisted, wrenched, and pulled. All it did was to hiss gently when he moved it toward the floor.

"Eek, Jeek," said Mewhu. He took the jet from Jack, pressed it. Jack watched closely. Then he grinned and took the cutter.

He swiftly cut the lumber up with it, sneering gayly at the rip-saw which hung on the wall. Then he put the whole trap together with a Z-brace, trimmed off the few rough corners, and stood back to admire it. He realized instantly that it was too heavy to carry by himself, let alone lift to the roof. If Mewhu had two good hands, now, or if— He scratched his head.

"Carry it on the flyin' belt, Daddy."

"Molly! What made you think of that?"

"Mewhu tol' . . . I mean, I sort of—"

"Let's get this straight once and for all. How does Mewhu talk to you?"

"I dunno, Daddy. It's sort of like I remembered something he said, but not the . . . the words he said. I jus' . . . jus'—" she faltered, and then said vehemently, "I don't know, Daddy. Truly I don't!"

"What'd he say this time?"

She looked at Mewhu. Again Jack noticed the peculiar swelling of Mewhu's silver mustache. She said "Put the door-you jus' made on the flyin' belt and lift it. The flyin' belt'll make it fall slow, and you can push it along while . . . it's . . . fallin'."

Jack looked at the door, at the jet

device, and got the idea. When he had slipped the jet-rod under the door, Mewhu gave him a lift. Up it came; and then Mewhu, steadying it, towed it well outside the garage before it finally sank to the ground. Another lift, another easy tow, and they covered thirty more feet. In this manner they covered the distance to the house, with Molly skipping and laughing behind, pleading for a ride and handing the grinning Mewhu a terrific brag.

At the house, Jack said, "Well, Einstein Junior, how do we get it up on the roof?"

Mewhu picked up Molly's yo-yo and began to operate it deftly. Doing so, he walked around the corner of the house.

"Hey!"

"He don't know, Daddy. You'll have to figger it out."

"You mean he could dream up that slick trick for carrying it out here and now his brains give out?"

"I guess so, Daddy."

Jack Garry looked after the retreating form of the silver man, and shook his head. He was already prepared to expect better than human reasoning from Mewhu, even if it was a little different. He couldn't quite phase this with Mewhu's shrugging off a problem in basic logic. Certainly a man with his capabilities would not have reasoned out such an ingenious method of bringing the door out here without realizing that that was only half the problem.

Shrugging, he went back to the garage and got a small block and tackle. He had to put up a big screw hook on the eave, and another on the new trapdoor; and once he had laboriously hauled the door up until the tackle was two-blocked, it was a little more than arduous to work it over the edge and drag it into position. Mewhu had apparently quite lost interest. It was two hours later, just as he put the last screw in the tower bolt on the trapdoor and was calling the job finished, that he heard Mewhu begin to shriek again. He dropped his tools, shrugged into the jet stick, and sailed off the roof.

"Iris! Iris! What's the matter?"

"I don't know, Jack. He's . . . he's—"

Jack pounded around the house to the front. Mewhu was lying on the ground in the midst of some violent kind of convulsion. He lay on his back, arching it high, digging his heels into the turf; and his head was bent back at an impossible angle, so that his weight was on his heels and his forehead. His good arm pounded the ground, though the splinted one lay

limp. His lips writhed and he uttered an edgy, gasping series of ululations quite horrible to listen to. He seemed to be able to scream as loudly when inhaling as when exhaling.

Molly stood beside him, watching him hypnotically. She was smiling. Jack knelt beside the writhing form and tried to steady it. "Molly, stop grinning at the poor fellow!"

"But—he's happy, Daddy."

"He's what?"

"Can't you see, silly? He feels—good, that's all. He's laughing!"

"Iris, what's the matter with him? Do you know?"

"He's been into the aspirin again, that's all I can tell you."

"He ate four," said Molly. "He loves 'em."

"What can we do, Jack?"

"I don't know, honey," said Jack worriedly. "Better just let him work it out. Any emetic or sedative we give him might be harmful."

The attack slackened and ceased suddenly, and Mewhu went quite limp. Again, with his hand over the man's chest, Jack felt the strange double pulsing.

"Out cold," he said.

Molly said in a strange, quiet voice,

"No, Daddy. He's lookin' at dreams."

"Dreams?"

"A place with a or'nge sky," said Molly. He looked up sharply. Her eyes were closed. "Lots of Mewhus. Hunderds an' hunderds—big ones. As big as Mr. Thorndyke." (Thorndyke was an editor whom they knew in the city. He was six feet seven.) "Round houses. an' big airplanes with . . . sticks fer wings."

"Molly, you're talking nonsense!" said her mother worriedly. Jack shushed her. "Go on, baby."

"A place, a room. It's a . . . Mewhu is there and a bunch more. They're in . . . in lines. Rows. There's a big one with a yella hat. He—keeps them in rows. Here's Mewhu. He's outa the line. He's jumpin' out th' windy with a flyin' belt." There was a long silence. Mewhu moaned.

"Well?"

"Nothin', Daddy—wait! It's . . . all . . . fuzzy. Now there's a thing, a kinda summerine. Only on the ground, not in the water. The door's open. Mewhu is . . . is inside. Knobs, and clocks. Pull on the knobs. Push a— Oh. Oh! It hurts!" She put her fists to her temples.

"Molly!"

Molly opened her eyes and said, quite calmly, "Oh, I'm all right, Mommy. It was a thing in the dream that hurt, but it

didn't hurt me. It was all a bunch of fire an' . . . an' a sleepy feeling, only bigger. An' it hurt."

"Jack, he'll harm the child!"

"I doubt it," said Jack.

"So do I," said Iris, wonderingly, and then, almost inaudibly, "Now, why did I say that?"

"Mewhu's asleep," said Molly suddenly.

"No more dreams?"

"No more dreams. Gee. That was—funny."

"Come and have some lunch," said Iris. Her voice shook a little. They went into the house. Jack looked down at Mewhu, who was smiling peacefully in his sleep. He thought of putting the strange creature to bed, but the day was warm and the grass was thick and soft where he lay. He shook his head and went into the house.

"Sit down and feed," Iris said.

He looked around. You've done wonders in here," he said. The litter of lath and plaster was gone and Iris' triumphant antimacassars blossomed from the upholstery. She curtsied. "Thank you, m'lord."

They sat around the card table and began to do damage to tongue sandwiches. "Jack."

"Mm-m?"

"What was that—telepathy?"

"Think so. Something like that. Oh, wait'll I tell Zinsser! He'll never believe it."

"Are you going down to the airfield this afternoon?"

"You bet. Maybe I'll take Mewhu with me."

"That would be a little rough on the populace, wouldn't it? Mewhu isn't the kind of fellow you can pass off as your cousin Julius."

"Heck, he'd be all right. He could sit in the back seat with Molly while I talked Zinsser into coming out to have look at him."

"Why not get Zinsser out her?"

"You know that's silly. When we see him in town, he's got time off. Out here he's tied to that airport almost every minute."

"Jack—do you think Molly's quite safe with that creature?"

"Of course! Are you worried?"

"I . . . I am, Jack. But not about Mewhu. About me. I'm worried because I think I should worry more, if you see what I mean."

Jack leaned over and kissed her. "The good old maternal instinct at work," he

chuckled. "Mewhu's new and strange and might be dangerous. At the same time Mewhu's helpless and inoffensive, and something in you wants to mother him too."

"There you really have something," said Iris, thoughtfully. "He's as big and ugly as you are, and unquestionably more intelligent. Yet I don't mother you."

Jack grinned. "You're not kiddin'." He gulped his coffee and stood up. "Eat it up, Molly, and go wash your hands and face. I'm going to have a look at Mewhu."

"You're going in to the airport, then?" asked Iris.

"If Mewhu's up to it. There's too much I want to know, too much I haven't the brains to figure out. I don't think I'll get all the answers from Zinsser, by any means; but between us we'll figure out what to do about this thing. Iris, it's big!"

Full of wild, induced speculation, he stepped out on the lawn. Mewhu was sitting up, happily contemplating a caterpillar.

"Mewhu."

"Dew?"

"How'd you like to take a ride?"

"Hubbilly grees, Jeek?"

"I guess you don't get the idea. C'mon," said Jack, motioning toward the garage. Mewhu very, very carefully set the caterpillar down on a blade of grass and rose to follow; and just then the most unearthly crash issued from the garage. For a frozen moment no one moved, and then Molly's voice set up a hair-raising reiterated screech. Jack was pounding toward the garage before he knew he had moved.

"Molly! what is it?"

At the sound of his voice the child shut up as if she were switch-operated.

"Molly!"

"Here I am, Daddy," she said in an extremely small voice. She was standing by the car, her entire being concentrated in her protruding, faintly quivering lower lip. The car was nose-foremost through the back wall of the garage.

"Daddy I didn't mean to do it; I just wanted to help you get the car out. Are you going to spank me? Please, Daddy, I didn't—"

"Quiet!"

She was quiet, but immediately. "Molly, what on earth possessed you to do a thing like that? You know you're not supposed to touch the starter!"

"I was pretending, Daddy, like it was a summerine that could fly, the way Mewhu did."

Jack threaded his way through this extraordinary shambles of syntax. "Come here," he said sternly. She came, her paces half-size, her feet dragging, her hands behind her where her imagination told her they would do the most good. "I ought to whack you, you know."

"Yeah," she answered tremulously. "I guess you oughta. Not more'n a couple of time, huh, Daddy?"

Jack bit the insides of his cheeks for control, but couldn't make it. He grinned. *You little minx*, he thought. "Tell you what," he said gruffly, looking at the car. The garage was fortunately flimsy, and the few new dents on hood and fenders would blend well with the old ones. "You've got three good whacks coming to you. I'm going to add those on to your next spanking."

"Yes, Daddy," said Molly, her eyes big and chastened. She climbed into the back seat and sat, very straight and small, away back out of sight. Jack cleared away what wreckage he could, and then climbed in, started the old puddle-vaulter and carefully backed out of the damaged shed.

Mewhu was standing well clear, watching the groaning automobile with startled silver eyes. "Come on in," said Jack, beckoning. Mewhu backed off.

"Mewhu!" cried Molly, putting her head out the rear door. Mewhu said "Yowk," and came instantly. Molly opened the door and he climbed in, and Molly shouted with laughter when he crouched down on the floor, and made him get up on the seat. Jack pulled around the house, stopped, picked up Mewhu's jet rod, blew a kiss through the window to Iris, and they were off.

Forty minutes later they wheeled up to the airport after an ecstatic ride during which Molly had kept up a running fire of descriptive commentary on the wonders of a terrestrial countryside. Mewhu had goggled and ogled in a most satisfactory fashion, listening spellbound to the child—sometimes Jack would have sworn that the silver man understood everything she said—and uttering little shrieks, exclamatory mewings, and interrogative peeps.

"Now," said Jack, when he had parked at the field boundary, "you two stay in the car for a while. I'm going to speak to Mr. Zinsser and see if he'll come out and meet Mewhu. Molly, do you think that you can make Mewhu understand that he's to stay in the car, and out of sight? You see, if other people see him, they'll want to ask a lot of silly questions, and we don't want to embarrass him, do we?"

"No, Daddy. Mewhu'll be good. Mewhu," she said, turning to the silver man. She held his eyes with hers. His mustache swelled, rippled. "You'll be good, won't you, and stay out of sight?"

"Jeek," said Mewhu. "Jeek mercedy."

"He says you're the boss."

Jack laughed, climbing out. "He does, eh?" Did the child really know or was it mostly a game? "Be good, then. See you soon." Carrying the jet rod, he walked into the building.

Zinsser, as usual, was busy. The field was not large, but did a great deal of private-plane business, and as traffic manager, Zinsser had his hands full. He wrapped one of his pudgy, flexible hands around the phone he was using. "Hi, Garry! What's new out of this world?" he grated cheerfully. "Siddown. With you in a minute." He bumbled cheerfully into the telephone, grinning at Jack as he talked. Jack made himself as comfortable as patience permitted and waited until Zinsser hung up.

"Well now," said Zinsser, and the phone rang again.

Jack closed his open mouth in annoyance. Zinsser hung up and another bell rang. He picked up a field telephone from its hook on the side of his desk. "Zinsser. 'Yes—'

"Now that's enough," said Jack to himself. He rose, went to the door, closed it softly so that he was alone with the manager. He took the jet rod, and to Zinsser's vast astonishment, stood up on his desk, raised the rod high over his head, and stepped off. A hurricane screamed out of the jets. Jack, hanging by his hands from the rod as it lowered him gently through the air, looked over his shoulder. Zinsser's face looked like a red moon in a snow flurry, surrounded as it was by every interoffice memo for the past two weeks.

Anyway, the first thing he did when he could draw a breath was to hang up the phone.

"Thought that would do it," said Jack, grinning.

"You . . . you . . . what is that thing?"

"It's a dialectical polarizer," said Jack, alighting. "That is, it makes conversations possible with airport managers who won't get off the phone."

Zinsser was out of his chair and around the desk, remarkably light on his feet for a man his size. "Let me see that."

Jack handed it over.

"Look, Mewhu! Here comes a plane!" Together they watched the Cub slide

in for a landing, and squeaked at the little puffs of dust that were thrown up by the tires and flicked away by the slipstream.

"And there goes another one. It's gonna take off!" The little blue low-wing coupé taxied across the field, braked one wheel, swung in its own length and roared down toward them, lifting to howl away into the sky far over their heads.

"Eeeeyow," droned Molly, imitating the sound of the motor as it passed overhead.

"S-s-s-s-sweeeeee!" hissed Mewhu, exactly duplicating the whine of control surfaces in the prop blast.

Molly clapped her hands and shrieked with delight. Another plane began to circle the field. They watched it avidly.

"Come on out and have a look at him," said Jack.

Zinsser looked at his watch. "I can't. All kidding aside, I got to stick by the phone for another half hour at the very least. Will he be all right out there? There's hardly anyone around."

"I think so. Molly's with him, and as I told you, they get along beautifully together. That's one of the things I want to have investigated—that telepathy angle." He laughed suddenly. "That Molly . . . know what she did this afternoon?" He told Zinsser about Molly's driving the car through the wrong end of the garage.

"The little hellion," chuckled Zinsser. "They'll all do it, bless 'em. At some time or other in his life, I think every kid climbs aboard something he doesn't know anything about and runs it wrong. My brother's kid went to work on the front lawn with his mother's vacuum cleaner the other day." He laughed. "To get back to what's-his-name—Mewhu, and this gadget of his. Jack, we've got to hang on to it. Do you realize that he and his clothes and this thing are the only clues we have as to what he is and where he came from?"

"I sure do. But listen—he's very intelligent. I'm sure he'll be able to tell us plenty."

"You can bet he's intelligent," said Zinsser. "He's probably above average on his planet. They wouldn't send just anyone on a trip like that. Jack, what a pity we don't have his ship!"

"Maybe it'll be back. What's your guess as to where he comes from?"

"Mars, maybe."

"Now, you know better than that. We know Mars has an atmosphere, but it's mighty tenuous. An organism the size of

Mewhu would have to have enormous lungs to keep him going. No; Mewhu's used to an atmosphere pretty much like ours."

"That would rule Venus out."

"He wears clothes quite comfortably here. His planet must have not only pretty much the same atmosphere, but the same climate. He seems to be able to take most of our foods, though he is revolted by some of them—and aspirin sends him high as a kite. He gets what looks like a laughing drunk on when he takes it."

"You don't say. Let's see; it wouldn't be Jupiter, because he isn't built to take a gravity like that. And the outer plants are too cold, and Mercury is too hot." Zinsser leaned back in his chair and absently mopped his bald head. "Jack, this guy doesn't even come from this solar system!"

"Gosh. I guess you're right. Harry, what do you make of this jet gadget?"

"From the way you say it cuts wood . . . can I see that, by the way?" Zinsser asked.

"Sure." Garry went to work on the jet. He found the right studs to press simultaneously. The casing opened smoothly. He lifted out the active core of the device, and, handling it gingerly, sliced a small corner off Zinsser's desk top.

"That is the strangest thing I have ever seen," said Zinsser. "May I see it?"

He took it and turned it over in his hands. "There doesn't seem to be any fuel for it," he said, musingly.

"I think it uses air," said Jack.

"But what pushes the air?"

"Air," said Jack. "No—I'm not kidding. I think that in some way it disintegrates part of the air, and uses the energy released to activate a small jet. If you had a shell around this jet, with an intake at one end and a blast tube at the other, it would operate like a high-vacuum pump, dragging more air through."

"Or like an athodyd," said Zinsser. Garry's blood went cold as the manager sighted down into the jet orifice. "For heaven's sake don't push that button."

"I won't. Say—you're right. The tube's concentric. Now, how on earth could a disruption unit be as small and light as that?"

Jack Garry said, "I've been chewing on that all day. I have one answer. Can you take something that sounds really fantastic, so long as it's logical?"

"You know me," grinned Zinsser, waving at a long shelf of back number science-fiction magazines. "Go ahead."

"Well," said Jack carefully. "You know what binding energy is. The stuff that holds the nucleus of an atom together. If I understand my smattering of nuclear theory properly, it seems possible to me that a sphere of binding energy could be produced that would be stable."

"A sphere? With what inside it?"

"Binding energy—or maybe just nothing . . . space. Anyhow, if you surround that sphere with another, this one a force-field which is capable of penetrating the inner one, or of allowing matter to penetrate it, it seems to me that anything entering that balance of forces would be disrupted. An explosive pressure would be bottled up inside the inner sphere. Now if you bring your penetrating field in contact with the binding-energy sphere, the pressures inside will come blasting out. Incase the whole rig in a device which controls the amount of matter going in one side of the sphere and the amount of orifice allowed for the escape of energy, and incase that further in an outside shell which will give you a stream of air induced violently through it—like the vacuum pump you mentioned—and you have this," and he rapped on the little jet motor.

"Most ingenious," said Zinsser, wagging his head. "Even if you're wrong, it's an ingenious theory. What you're saying, you know, is that all we have to do to duplicate this device is to discover the nature of binding energy and then find a way to make it stay stably in spherical form. After which we figure out the nature of a field which can penetrate binding energy and allow any matter to do likewise—one way." He spread his hands. "That's all. Just learn to actually use the stuff that the long-hair boys haven't thought of theorizing about yet, and we're all set."

"Shucks," said Garry, "Mewhu will give us all the dope."

"I hope so, Jack, this can revolutionize the entire industrial world!"

"You're understating," grinned Jack.

The phone rang. Zinsser looked at his watch again. "There's my call." He sat down, answered the phone, and while he went on at great length to some high-powered character at the other end of the line, about bills of lading and charter service and interstate commerce restrictions. Jack lounged against the cut-off corner of the desk and dreamed. Mewhu—a superior member of a superior race, come to earth to lead struggling humanity out of its strugling wasteful ways. He wondered what Mewhu was like at home among his strange people.

Young, but very mature, he decided, and gifted in many ways—the pick of the crop, fit to be ambassador to a new and dynamic civilization like Earth's. And what about the ship? Having dropped Mewhu, had it and its pilot returned to the mysterious corner of the universe from which they had come? Or was it circling about somewhere in space, anxiously awaiting word from the adventurous ambassador.

Zinsser cradled his instrument and stood up with a sigh. "A credit to my will power," he said. "The greatest thing that has ever happened to me, and I stuck by the day's work in spite of it. I feel like a kid on Christmas Eve. Let's go have a look at him."

"*Whereeevowow!*" screamed Mewhu as another rising plane passed over their heads. Molly bounced joyfully up and down on the cushions, for Mewhu was an excellent mimic.

The silver man slipped over the back of the driver's seat in a lithe movement, to see a little better around the corner of a nearby hangar. One of the Cubs had been wheeled into it, and was standing not far away, its prop ticking over.

Molly leaned her elbows on the edge of the seat and stretched her little neck so she could see, too. Mewhu brushed against her head and her hat fell off. He bent to pick it up and bumped his own head on the dashboard, and the glove compartment flew open. His strange pupils narrowed, and the nictitating membranes flickered over his eyes as he reached inside. The next thing Molly knew, he was out of the car and running over the parking area, leaping high in the air, mouthing strange noises, and stopping every few jumps to roll and beat with his good hand on the ground.

Horried, Molly Garry left the car and ran after him. "Mewhu!" she cried. "Mewhu, come back!"

He cavorted toward her, his arms outspread. "W-r-r-row-w!" he shouted, rushing past her. Lowering one arm a little and raising the other like an airplane banking, he ran in a wide arc, leaped the little tarmac retaining wall and bounded out onto the hangar area.

Molly, panting and sobbing stopped and stamined her foot. "Mewhu!" she croaked helplessly. "Daddy said—"

Two mechanics standing near the idling Cub looked around at a sound like a civet-cat imitating an Onondaga war whoop. What they saw was a long-legged, silver-gray apparition with a

silver-white mustache, and slotted eyes, dressed in a scarlet robe that turned to indigo. Without a sound, moving as one man, they cut and ran. And Mewhu with one last terrible shriek of joy, leaped to the plane and disappeared inside.

Molly put her hands to her mouth and her eyes bugged. "Oh, Mewhu," she breathed. "Now you've done it." She heard pounding feet, turned. Her father was racing toward her, with Mr. Zinsser waddling behind. "Molly! Where's Mewhu?"

Wordlessly, she pointed at the Cub; and as if it were a signal, the little ship throttled up and began to crawl away from the hangars.

"Hey! Wait! Wait!" screamed Jack Garry uselessly, sprinting after the plane. He leaped the wall but misjudged it because of his speed. His toe hooked it and he sprawled slitheringly, jarringly on the tarmac. Zinsser and Molly ran to him, helped him up. Jack's nose was bleeding. He whipped out a handkerchief, looking out at the dwindling plane. "Mewhu!"

The little plane waddled across the field, bellowed suddenly with power. The tail came up, and it scooted away from them—cross wind, cross the runway. Jack turned to speak to Zinsser and saw the fat man's face absolutely stricken. He followed Zinsser's eyes and saw the other plane, the big six-place cabin job, coming in.

He had never felt so helpless in all his life. Those planes were going to collide. There was nothing anyone could do about it. He watched them, unblinking, almost detachedly. They were hurtling but they seemed to creep; the moment lasted forever. Then, with twenty feet altitude, Mewhu cut his gun and dropped a wing. The Cub slowed, leaned into the wind, and *side-slipped* so close under the cabin ship that another coat of paint on either craft would have meant disaster.

Jack didn't know how long he had been holding that breath, but it was agony when he let it out.

"Anyway, he can fly," breathed Zinsser.

"Of course he can fly," snapped Jack. "A prehistoric thing like an airplane would be child's play for him. Child's play."

"Oh, Daddy. I'm scared."

"I'm not," said Jack hollowly.

"Me, too," said Zinsser with an unconvincing laugh. "The plane's insured."

The Cub arrowed upward. At a hundred feet it went into a skidding turn,

harrowing to watch, suddenly winged over and came shouting down at them. Mewhu buzzed them so close that Zinsser went flat on his face. Jack and Molly simply stood there, wall-eyed. An enormous cloud of dust obscured every thing for ninety interminable seconds. When they next saw the plane it was wobbling crazily at a hundred and fifty.

Suddenly Molly screamed piercingly and put her hands over her face.

"Molly! Kiddo, what is it?"

She flung her arms around his neck and sobbed so violently that he knew it was hurting her throat. "Stop it!" he yelled; and then, very gently, he asked, "What's the matter, darling?"

"He's scared. Mewhu's terrible, terrible scared," she said brokenly.

Jack looked up at the plane. It yawed, fell away on one wing.

Zinsser shouted, his voice cracking, "Gun her! Gun her! Throttle up, you idiot!"

Mewhu cut the gun.

Dead stick, the plane winged over and plunged to the ground. The impact was crushing.

Molly said, quite calmly, "All Mewhu's pictures have gone out now," and slumped unconscious to the ground.

They got him to the hospital. It was messy—all of it; picking him up, carrying him to the ambulance—

Jack wished fervently that Molly had not seen; but she had sat up and cried as they carried him past. He thought worriedly as he and Zinsser crossed and recrossed in their pacing of the waiting room, that he would have his hands full with the child when this thing was all over.

The resident physician came in, wiping his hands. He was a small man with a nose like a walnut meat. "Who brought that plane-crash case in here—you?"

"Both of us," said Zinsser.

"What . . . who is he?"

"A friend of mine. Is he . . . will he live?"

"How should I know?" snapped the doctor impatiently. "I have never in my experience—" He exhaled through his nostrils. "The man has two circulatory systems. Two *closed* circulatory systems, and a heart for each. All his arterial blood looks venous—it's purple. How'd he happen to get hurt?"

"He ate half a box of aspirin out of my car," said Jack. "Aspirin makes him drunk. He swiped a plane and piled it up."

"Aspirin makes him—" The doctor looked at each of them in turn. "I won't ask if you're kidding me. Just to see that . . . that thing in there is enough to kid any doctor. How long has that splint been on his arm?"

Zinsser looked at Jack and Jack said "About eighteen hours."

"Eighteen *hours*?" The doctor shook his head. "It's so well knitted that I'd say eighteen days." Before Jack could say anything he added. "He needs a transfusion."

"But you can't! I mean . . . his blood—"

"I know. Took a sample to type it. I have two technicians trying to blend chemicals into plasma so we can approximate it. Both of 'em called me a liar. But he's got to have the transfusion. I'll let you know." He strode out of the room.

"There goes one bewildered medico."

"He's O.K.," said Zinsser. "I know him well. Can you blame him?"

"For feeling that way? Gosh no. Harry. I don't know what I'll do if Mewhu checks out."

"That fond of him?"

"Oh, it isn't only that. But to come so close to meeting a new culture, and then have it slip from our fingers like this—it's too much."

"That jet . . . Jack, without Mewhu to explain it, I don't think any scientist will be able to build another. It would be like . . . like giving a Damascus swordsmith some tungsten and asking him to draw it into filaments. There the jet would be, hissing when you shove it toward the ground, sneering at you."

"And that telepathy—what J. B. Rhine wouldn't give to be able to study it!"

"Yeah, and what about his origin?" Zinsser asked excitedly. "He isn't from this system. It means that he used an interstellar drive of some kind, or even that space-time warp the boys write about."

"He's got to live," said Jack. "He's got to, or there ain't no justice. There are too many things we've got to know, Harry! Look—he's here. That must mean that some more of his people will come some day."

"Yeah. Why haven't they come before now?"

"Maybe they have. Charles Forte—"

"Aw, look," said Zinsser, "don't let's get this thing out of hand."

The doctor came back. "I think he'll make it."

"Really?"

"Not really. Nothing real about that character. But from all indications, he'll be O.K. Responded very strongly. What does he eat?"

"Pretty much the same as we do, I think."

"You think. You don't seem to know much about him."

"I don't. He only just got here. No—don't ask me where from," said Jack. "You'll have to ask him."

The doctor scratched his head. "He's out of this world. I can tell you that. Obviously adult, but every fracture but one is a greenstick break; kind of thing you see on a three-year-old. Transparent membranes over his . . . what are you laughing at?" he asked suddenly.

Jack had started easily, with a chuckle, but it got out of control. He roared.

Zinsser said, "Jack! Cut it out. This is a hosp—"

Jack shoved his hand away. "I . . . I got to," he said helplessly and went off on another peal.

"You've got to what?"

"Laugh," said Jack, gasping. He sobered—he more than sobered. "It has to be funny, Harry. I won't let it be anything else."

"What the devil do you—"

"Look, Harry. We assumed a lot about Mewhu, his culture, his technology, his origin . . . we'll never know anything about it!"

"Why? You mean he won't tell us—"

"He won't tell us. I'm wrong. He'll tell us plenty. But it won't do any good. Here's what I mean. Because he's our size, because he obviously arrived in a spaceship, because he brought a gadget or two that's obviously the product of a highly advanced civilization, we believe that he produced the civilization; that he's a superior individual in his own place."

"Well, he must be."

"He must be? Harry, did Molly invent the automobile?"

"No, but—"

"But she drove one through the back of the garage."

Light began to dawn on Zinsser's moon face. "You mean—"

"It all fits! Remember when Mewhu figured out how to carry that heavy trapdoor of mine on the jet stick, and then left the problem half-finished? Remember his fascination with Molly's yo-yo? What about that peculiar rapport he has with Molly that he has with no one else? Doesn't that begin to look reasonable? Look at Irls' reaction to him—almost maternal, though she didn't know why."

"The poor little fellow," breathed Zinsser. "I wonder if he thought he was home when he landed?"

"Poor little fellow—sure," said Jack, and began to laugh again. "Can Molly tell you how an internal combustion works? Can she explain laminar flow on an airfoil?" He shook his head. "You wait and see. Mewhu will be able to tell us the equivalent of Molly's 'I rode in the car with Daddy and we went sixty miles an hour.'"

"But how did he get here?"

"How did Molly get through the back of my garage?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "About that I don't know. But his biological reactions do look like those of a child—and if he is a child, then his rate of tissue restoration will be high, and I'll guarantee he'll live."

Zinsser groaned. "Much good will it do us—and him, poor kid. With a kid's inherent faith in any intelligent adult anywhere, he's probably been feeling happily sure we'd get him home somehow. Well—we haven't got what it takes, and won't have for a long, long time. We don't know enough to start duplicating that jet of his—and that was just a little kid's toy on his world."



The Unforeseen

By MARK CHAMPION

A prison break is successful only when it employs some factor which neither foresight nor past experience has called to the attention of the guards. The key to freedom is—the unforeseen.

RANDALL squirmed clear of the aperture of the servicing cubicle, lunged free, shoved his hanging body out with his left hand. He hung a moment like a fly on the face of that immense wall of the Block, the fingers of his right hand hooked. Then he opened them, dropped.

It was sixty feet from the air intake of the hospital to the roof of the warehouse below. But in the light gravity Randall took the shock without spilling.

He came up instantly from his flexed knees. The pale sheen of Phobus, climbing fast to top the penal institution's high towers, limned him starkly. He felt exposed and moved, swiftly as a hunting leopard, vaulting a low wall to the top of the Interward Ramp, sprinting along the Ramp toward the Exec Wing.

Over him glittered the myriad stars in the Martian sky, diamond hard and burning.

There was no sound in this world of cold thin air, crystallized in its ages-old deathlike immobility, except the slap of his sandaled feet, and the low, sullen hum of the Block.

Phobus climbed.

On the lips of the nocturnal prowler there traced a tight, hard smile. So far, his elemental strategy had worked against the complex rationalized technologic system that made the Block revolt-proof and escape-proof.

The sirens were still silent.

Once the sirens let go, an involved mechanical reflex, the Actualities Arc, housed in the Exec Wing, would be fed data by the so-called Periscope, an aggregate of scanner and robot-eye relay videos. The Arc would immediately produce the spot reaction which nipped prison breaks in the attempt.

If the radrifle towers, in activation, did not get the prisoner on the walls, the quarry shells outside would.

The shells had noses like bloodhounds. They hunted by radar and killed by bolt. Convicts spoke of them with a helpless and weary hate.

Randall reached the first of the radrifle towers.

Flattened against the curved stelene, he let his gaze range. The Valley of the Titans, southward, ran like a steep walled river of pale ochre sand, stippled here and there with spatulated chori shrub, the ubiquitous growth of wasteland Mars.

Gigantic figures, rough hewn out of the tufa cliffs that made the walls of the valley, flanked the pale lit sand and dim in the moonlight were visible broken shards of the Canaler civilization whose builders had been dead for a thousand centuries.

If the ghosts of the Canalers moved here, the wraiths were pale. The Block dominated the Valley. Out over the sere cold deserts to the south, lonely plains split by an immense maw, the Rift, crimson streaks marked the jets of a passing transport inbound from the Syrtis mine-lands to New Midland.

This was Terran domain. Midleague domain.

Randall, waiting, flicked his gaze up to one star in the panoply of the constellations overhead. The home world of his breed. He was Texan by birth, and a citizen of Marsport on the equator, in the Trustland of the American Region. Sympathy had joined him to the Brotherhood of Space, an underground organization fighting the policies of the Midleague in every city established by the World Union. A dragnet of the dread Midleague Bureaucracy had seized him a year before.

It seemed a century. For an instant cold bitterness showed and passed in Alan Randall's eyes, as he shifted his wide shoulders, feeling the twinge in his sinews, the residues of many stun-gun lashings. It was war between him and the Bureaucracy, war without quarter. If he could make this break, much more than his own life depended on the feat.

"Well, here goes."

The words came from Randall in a swift, low whisper. All his muscles pulled

together for the ordeal. His gaze focused on a swift scudding blob of shadow that suddenly detached itself from the gloom east of the Block, and flitted over lawns and walls toward the moat and the Exec Wing.

It was the inner grounds Ro-Eye.

The Ro-Eye itself was traveling as silently as its moon-cast shadow, some eighty feet over the Interward Ramp. It was a microjetted cylinder with an infra-red projector and a cluster of photocells in its nose. As it swept around and around the Block, it relayed the shifting view to the Periscope and its infra-red eyes probed into the deepest gloom, missing nothing.

Randall slid around the rad rifle tower, intently watching that flitting shadow but careful to keep the opaque steel of the tower between him and the robot watchdog.

When the Ro-Eye's shadow was close to the moat, he jumped for it.

Randall put everything he had into that fateful rush. Teeth gritted, eyes glazed, he covered twenty, thirty, forty feet at a bound.

There were only split instants of leeway.

At this angle of his progress three of the rad rifle towers were echeloned toward the east. The Ro-Eye, scudding past, did not register that tigerishly leaping figure.

There was no alarm.

Coming down from his last straight-away spring, across the moat, Randall threw himself forward and over the Ramp Wall into the grounds of the Exec Wing.

He landed squarely on a man's shoulders.

Through the thin cold air sounded a muffled, surprised curse.

It was a stark choice. Defeat and death for Randall. Or a quick kill.

The shock of the fall had spilled both men. Randall, rolling over, came up first. He made out in the moonlight, the uniform of a Block guard. His hands shot out, seized the tufts on the guard's parkalike helmet, wrenched.

The short scream died.

The sirens snarled and wailed into full cry. That high fierce keening cut the unearthly silence, filled the Valley.

Inside his ornate quarters, done in damaskine and plastex, in the Exec Wing, Gowler Lodner woke, cursing peevishly.

The fools would never learn.

Three attempted breaks in a week.

Death to the idiots venturing against mathematical certainty. Irritation for Lodner and the chief guard, even though the Arc always took care of the situations, expeditiously, in a matter of moments.

Lodner knew the "Emergency Met" signal would sound long before he got down to the Periscope. Bureaucracy regulations, however, had it that he had to sign off every incident himself in a spot report to the video center in New Midland.

Growing something highly uncomplimentary about the arrogance of the big shots in the capital, Lodner got out of bed. He silenced his wife's questions with a peevish snap. By the time he had donned his tunic his irritation was growing and when he stepped out into the circular hall that curved down toward the Tech and Transit floor he was definitely in one of his ugly moods.

What fool was responsible for the sirens shorting?

It was plainly a mechanical failure, for the Arc would have disposed of a genuine eventuality by now. Still the sirens wailed and wailed.

Fluro light lay in a pale-orange wash over the little foyer between Transit and the Periscope. A burly individual detached himself from a knot of arguing uniformed men to salute Lodner.

"I'm sure, sir," said Chief Guard Horovic, "the Corrective, or the General Action of the Arc, will have the situation under control in a few minutes."

"What are you talking about?" snapped Lodner. Little spots of red showed on his cheekbones.

"The prisoner, sir. Y424. Block ward 8. Alan Randall."

"Well?"

"He made a break and killed a guard. What's more?"—Horovic touched dry lips with his tongue—"the first scanners didn't register him. He passed the A1 Ro-Eye circuit—"

"He passed the circuit—?" For a moment it seemed Lodner would explode. Then his will gripped his hyper-irascible temper.

Horovic was a heavy jowled man with blank fish eyes. Lodner shoved him unceremoniously aside and strode out of the foyer to the Periscope, kicking the door open. That persistent wailing of the sirens was an infuriating and humiliating thing. Perhaps that pig of a prisoner, that—who was it—Y424, was laughing at him.

"You!" harked Lodner, standing in the doorway. "What are you gaping at?"

He was looking into a long, severely utilitarian room, lit only by flickering glows reflecting from the grouped scanner videos and the moving center strip of the Ro-Eye relay.

Standing back a few feet from the disks and frames and the fluxing panels was a lean man in Tech overalls, a knob micro adjuster in his hand. He was curiously rigid. His eyes were wide with a peculiar excitation.

Lodner clawed at his belt, failed to find his disciplinary stun gun, turned to Horovic, who was entering behind him, and yanked the cruel stud nosed electronic clubber from the chief guard's waist clip.

The Tech man said, "Sir, I've done nothing."

Lodner threw the gun on him. The Tech man tried to dodge. But the bolts sledged the quick turning shoulder and head. The Tech man was slapped over. He lay huddled on the floor.

Lodner tossed the stun gun on a flange between the stills and the fluxing panels. "I'll teach you to stand and gawk at me, you swine," said Lodner coldly and turned his attention to the disks.

Five minutes later the sadistic gaoler was sweating. A thread of unease and surprise, of fear, ran through his rage.

The fleeing man was dwarfed by the gigantic figures carved in tufa, looming over the Valley.

A dark mote in the pale Phobus sheen, the man ran tirelessly south, to grow dim in a tracery of shadow cast by the ruins of the ancient Canaler city that walled the Valley floor.

"The shells—where are the quarry shells?" raged Lodner, his hands gripping the video frame, his gaze focused on that incredible scene relayed into the disk of G3 Ro-Eye. G3. It was five miles from the Block.

"He's got a trick bolter. He must have had a trick bolter!" muttered Horovic, over and over.

"Shut up!" snapped Lodner in his heedless and characteristic rage. He spun around. "You, there—Micail—get me a re-view. I want the scanner stills around the Ramp and the AI Ro-Eye at 1435 to 1440."

Micail, the lean Tech man, had picked himself up from the floor. "Yes, sir," he said very quickly. His eyes were absolutely blank.

There was a continuous scurrying of feet in the foyer outside as guards boiled toward Transit. For the first time in the Block's history aside from its routine

drills, the telautographs were clicking in every department. Iron shutters were sealing off all the Block wards. Mobile guard cycles were roaring in the main yard. The robots that made escape from the Block impossible had—failed.

"How? How?" raged Lodner.

"There's the blanking!" Horovic was excited. His heavy jaw hung loose. He pointed at the re-views. "There! AI went out! At 1437!"

"Why don't the scanner stills show him bolting the Ro-Eye?"

Horovic shrugged. "That I don't know."

Lodner's thin lips were like a gash in his face. "Yes, and you don't know of any bolt that can blank a Ro-Eye. Nor does the Midleague Foundation or even the Terran Institute."

"He must have had it," muttered Horovic.

Lodner yelled orders. A small balding man came from the foyer. It was Eston, chief Tech man.

"What kind of a gun will blank a Ro-Eye, Eston?" asked Lodner sardonically.

"No kind, sir, as you know."

"I know no more than you blasted sniveling scientific swine tell me!" roared Lodner. He pointed. "Look at this!"

The disks were gray.

A captain of cycle guards came in and departed hastily at Lodner's snarled: "Start? Of course you're to start? Hunt the vermin down!"

Beads of sweat were gathering on the gaoler's forehead. The Bureaucracy would make an inquiry. The Bureaucracy always made inquiries. And it didn't matter where the blame really lay. For an official, a summons to New Midland meant—oblivion.

Horovic was saying: "He gained the outside without technical aids. He was hospitalized. He took a running jump hitting a cot mattress for catapult and leaped clear to the air vent. No ordinary man could have done it. And no ordinary man could so have dislocated his own shoulder by muscular action as to trick the medics into hospitalizing him."

"Muscular action?" Lodner's face contorted. "Get me this man's dossier!"

Waiting, he went back to the videos G4 was relaying.

The scene was the southern opening of the Valley. A spreading plain of red sand, the last looming shadows of the tufa Titans, and a vague figure, itself a shadow among the shadows, that ran toward the open desert and the stupendous gorge of the Rift.

Lodner, watching, suddenly blew his breath out in one harsh, triumphant word.

Scudding down valley, rapidly overtaking its prey, its metal casing glinting in the moon glow, was a quarry shell.

The man fought a losing running fight against inevitable doom.

H2 was relaying.

It was far to the south and west of the Valley of the Titans. The Ro-Eye, cruising the open desert on the north side of the Rift, showed the fugitive, still running, hounded by several shells.

Twice the hunted man turned. Twice he threw up his right arm. From a knocking in his right hand there winked a bright small eye of intense blue.

One of the shells dipped and crashed. It scored the desert, raising a thin plume of dust in the moonlight.

"I told you he had a trick holter," said Horovic, astonishment thick in his voice.

Lodner was cursing monotonously. The New Midland signal was on the tele. The Bureaucracy was already impatient about this unusual and protracted confusion, relayed by the Arc in facsimile.

"A new holter!" raged Lodner. It should be such a sensation that the Bureaucracy might not concentrate on the slipup which had allowed a gun to be smuggled into the Block.

"Even with that, how can he hit a shell on the wing?" muttered Horovic. Lodner had ceased trying to think it out. He wiped the sweat from his brow. That fugitive figure, dim in the distance, was his nemesis.

The Brotherhood of Space would propagandize this break. The story would spread, through New Midland, to Marsport and the mining towns, of how one man had thrown the entire Block into confusion—how a man had made his way through ring after ring of Arc action, to the open desert. Even in dying that man was striking a heavy blow at the Bureaucracy.

Lodner fumed, his eyes glued to the screens.

The amazing fugitive brought down two more shells. H2 was now registering very faintly. The disk was dim. But Lodner could make out the details of the deadly little drama. A shell arced wide, came in from the west—and scored with its lance beam.

Smoke puffed from the fugitive's body. He staggered along the rim of the monster canyon, tried to turn. He stumbled. And went over the edge.

Lodner's stiffened frame relaxed.

Breath blew through his distended nostrils. "Done!" he said. "It's done!"

With a great effort, then, he controlled himself, harked orders. Horovic departed. Lodner said, "Micail, co-ordinate me with Central. An Arc signoff."

Micail moved efficiently, his eyes curiously lidded.

The signoff was ready. Lodner ruffled the dossier on Alan Randall and spoke into the tele.

"The attempted escape of Convict Y424, Alan Randall, had some unusual features. The Arc was circumvented, first of all, by this convict's unusual physical capacities, as displayed in a dislocation of his own arm and a spectacular leap, a fantastic, unobserved feat which enabled him to gain the outside without scanner detection. Our records show that this same Randall is an American Regional by birth and the winner of the Interplanetary Meet in 947 in Marsport. He became active in the Brotherhood of Space shortly thereafter and was caught in a New Midland stakeout in 49. He was in the Block for two hundred twenty-seven transits of Deimos."

Lodner's voice hoarsened.

"Alarm went off at 1445, due to a filament break at base of the Ramp. An Exec Wing guard was found there, his neck broken.

"Randall was . . . in some way"—Lodner sweated—"in possession of a secret or new needle beam gun. With it he must have stunned the Exec guard, toppling him from the Ramp. With it he blanked, in succession, at least nine Ro-Eyes, for the Arc was first activated visibly by G3, beyond the outer grounds. G3's reaction consists of eight quarry shells. For some as yet unascertained reason, these shells failed to hunt him down in mid-Valley."

Lodner wet his dry lips. He knew now that he was reading his own sentence of demotion and exile and possibly worse.

"Randall was finally disposed of by Ro-Eye H2's reaction well beyond the Valley. His body will be round in the Rift."

Lodner spoke defiantly. "I recommend a thorough investigation of Penology Liaison, which is responsible for the Block not being advised of this revolutionary weapon developed by the Brotherhood, a handgun beam capable of piercing an Imperm field.

"Signed—Lodner, Gaoler."

He slid his gaze to the tele. The "Check" did not come. He had not really expected it. The hard bright words traced

on the hand. "Gaoler Lodner will report to Bureauacy Center. In person. At once."

Lodner turned, cursing the man who had died far from the Valley. His rage had to find vent. As he spun on his heel he saw the Tech man, Micail, watching him and could have sworn he saw a mocking glint in Micail's eyes. Lodner's spleen erupted. He lunged for the stun gun on the flange beside him. Again he threw the gun on Micail, advancing the charge high, clubbing the technician savagely.

Micail went down but this time he did not writhe. As Lodner strode over him and out the Tech man's eyes still held their look of mockery.

Randall waited.

The interior of Transit was white lit. The skytrucks in the main hangar, the personnel ferries, the little turbojet flier warming up on the Exec apron all were clear in the cold cathode glow. But up near the ceiling there was shadow. Randall was barely discernible, straddling the big coaxial cable that came from the Periscope and led to the powerhouse.

There was no one on the apron after Micail left. Servicers talked in the main hangar hidden from Randall's view. The flier's jets hummed softly. Lodner came to the door of Transit, pulling on his gauntlets, signaling Micail who was over by the switchboard.

The excitement in the Block had died. Only one guard was at Transit's outer lift door. At Lodner's signal Micail tripped the switch which threw in a compensating circuit in the nose of every Ro-Eye, allowing the passage of the flier which would be registered on the videos but with the quarry reaction cut out.

Lodner reached the little ship, circled it.

Randall swung down. He hit the floor hidden from the guard and reached the flier in two long swift leaps.

Some instinct warned Lodner. He lunged around. Randall hit him in a solid plunge, jamming both their bodies hard against the flier's stub wing.

Lodner's hand clawed for his stun gun. The move was frenzied. But it was comparatively slow. For the weapon was already out of its clip. Randall's fist gripped the stock. The muzzle jammed hard into the gaoler's stomach.

Close up they were, straining. Complete incredulity was in Lodner's eyes. "Y424," he whispered. "Randall!" And he thought he screamed.

His mouth opened for the yell. Randall hit him with the stun bolt at full force. The sledge stroke caught Lodner in the solar plexus. His jaw gaped. His eyes glazed. He was limp in Randall's grip.

Randall slid the little cockpit of the flier open and unceremoniously jammed Lodner inside. As he worked his own body in he saw that the guard had stepped a little way from the door and was looking toward the flier. Randall shoved Lodner past the control. He let the gaoler's profile show at the cockpit window, briefly.

A moment later the flier's key-beam hit the selenium plate over Transit's door, lifting it. The jets coughed softly. The flier kicked itself away from the apron. Its stub wings took hold of cold air.

Randall waved down to a motionless Micail. The Tech man nodded almost imperceptibly.

The apron lip, the round roof of the Periscope, the Exec buildings were dropping away. The monoliths of the Block retreated. The grounds seemed to revolve, tilt. Little glints showed the reflections of the Phobus sheen on the ceaselessly cruising Ro-Eyes.

Lodner groaned.

Randall's face was devoid of emotion. He watched the Valley slide backward, like a flowing river of ochre sand, over which brooded the great figures hewn in tufa and the remnants of the Canaler city.

The Rift crossed the flat desert to the south. Phobus was at zenith, moving eastward almost visibly among the constellations. A wild chaos of rock, in that eastern distance, rimmed the deserts, separating the wastelands from the Cyrtis minchheads and the Midleague's capital.

In a crotch of those far hills, Deimos was rising.

Lodner's left hand made a small scraping sound, fumbling for the panel trip.

The gaoler was trying to squeeze away from Randall. The stream of his incoherent mutterings finally made sense.

"—in the devil are you? A necromancer? I saw you hit. I saw you fall. Besides, how could you get back?"

"I was never there."

Lodner gagged.

"G3 picked you up in mid-Valley. All the down Valley Ro-Eyes—"

"It was staged."

"Staged?"

"The Brotherhood filmed it. Fortunately for us there are many Canaler ruins

and rows of their great idols located in sheer walled valleys that debouch on the Equatorial Rift. The location was similar—the scenes were shot when Phohus was in transit—drone shells were used—”

Lodner whispered insanely. “You mean—the *Periscope* was fixed!”

“Exactly.” A hard contempt was in Randall’s eyes. “How else? How could the Brotherhood with its limited resources, develop a bolt which could blank Imperm fields, a feat the Union’s Space Navy hasn’t achieved? That which was smuggled in to me wasn’t a gun. It was a microreel the size of a thimble, its first sequences blank to give the impression I had shot out the Ro-Eyes. It was synchronized to give the first view on the G3 panel, well down where the Block was no longer visible—”

His words cut off. Lodner made a maniacal lunge. Randall fended the gaoler off with one thrust of a hard-muscled shoulder.

Below, the Rift yawned.

“I’ve got the reel with me now,” said Randall coldly. “I slipped it out after you slugged Micail and left. A primitive strategy, wasn’t it, to set up against the Arc? But it was your own howling primitiveness, Lodner, which assured its success.”

“How?”

“Micail caught me just after I had reached the *Periscope*. I was unarmed. He just looked at me and motioned me up toward the coaxial cable conduits. No, he wasn’t our man. There’s the cream of the jest. I understood why he acted that way, later. What you overlooked, Lodner,

were the elemental things. Among them, the kickback from your own pretty habit of holt whipping your subordinates—”

Something was snapping in Lodner’s mind. He lunged for Randall again. Shoved off once more by a contemptuous strength he could not match, he swung around, clawed the fuselage door open. He would score the only triumph he could over this man who had destroyed him. He threw himself out.

Randall hanked the flier, circling down briefly after the falling body. The Rift yawned nearer. Lodner plummeted into gloom.

Randall climbed back toward the glittering constellations.

The Bureaucracy had been embarrassed and more. Its police would find nothing amiss with the *Periscope* and it would take time to sift out the truth from the evidence of men who would swear they saw the Ro-Eyes blanked. The Brotherhood might even send a plane to drop a shell casing in the desert, to further confuse the grim ferrets of the Midleague.

They would even find a body in the Rift. As Lodner had advised.

A tight, hard and mocking smile touched Randall’s lips. The war between the great Midleague, rebel to the ideals of the World Union, and the Brotherhood of Space, was still uneven. But the myth of Midleague invincibility was being broken and a counter tradition was in process of being created.

The stub wings of the little flier sang as it hurtled toward the southlands and Phohus, like a yellow, judging eye, began to slide down the arc of the eastern sky.



HOBBIES

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

The cities were deserted, save for one. The men and women of that city had hobbies—but no accomplishments. The robots they had left behind were doing better . . .

THE rabbit ducked around a bush and the little black dog zipped after him, then dug in his heels and skidded. In the pathway stood a wolf, the rabbit's twitching, bloody body hanging from his jaws.

Ebenezer stood very still and panted, red rag of a tongue lolling out, a little faint and sick at the sight before him.

It had been such a nice rabbit!

Feet pattered on the trail behind him and Shadow whizzed around the bush, slid to a stop alongside Ebenezer.

The wolf flicked his glare from the dog to the pint-size robot, then back to the dog again. The yellow light of wilderness slowly faded from his eyes.

"You shouldn't have done that, Wolf," said Ebenezer, softly. "The rabbit knew I wouldn't hurt him and it was all in fun. But he ran straight into you and you snapped him up."

"There's no use talking to him," Shadow hissed out of the corner of his mouth. "He doesn't know a word you're saying. Next thing you know, he'll be gulping you."

"Not with you around, he won't," said Ebenezer. "And, anyhow, he knows me. He remembers last winter. He was one of the pack we fed."

The wolf paced forward slowly, step by cautious step, until less than two feet separated him from the little dog. Then, very slowly, very carefully, he laid the rabbit on the ground, nudged it forward with his nose.

Shadow made a tiny sound that was almost a gasp. "He's giving it to you!"

"I know," said Ebenezer calmly. "I told you he remembered. He's the one that had a frozen ear and Jenkins fixed it up."

The dog advanced a step, tail wagging, nose outstretched. The wolf stiffened momentarily, then lowered his ugly head and sniffed. For a second the two noses almost rubbed together, then the wolf stepped back.

"Let's get out of here," urged Shadow. "You high-tail it down the trail and I'll

bring up the rear. If he tries anything—"

"He won't try anything," snapped Ebenezer. "He's a friend of ours. It's not his fault about the rabbit. He doesn't understand. It's the way he lives. To him a rabbit is just a piece of meat."

Even, he thought, as it once was for us. As it was for us before the first dog came to sit with a man before a cave-mouth fire—and for a long time after that. Even now a rabbit sometimes—

Moving slowly, almost apologetically, the wolf reached forward, gathered up the rabbit in his gaping jaws. His tail moved—not quite a wag, but almost.

"You see!" cried Ebenezer and the wolf was gone. His feet moved and there was a blur of gray fading through the trees—a shadow drifting in the forest.

"He took it back," fumed Shadow. "Why, the dirty—"

"But he gave it to me," said Ebenezer triumphantly. "Only he was so hungry he couldn't make it stick. He did something a wolf has never done before. For a moment he was more than an animal."

"Indian giver," snapped Shadow.

Ebenezer shook his head. "He was ashamed when he took it back. You saw him wag his tail. That was explaining to me—explaining he was hungry and he needed it. Worse than I needed it."

The dog stared down the green aisles of the fairy forest, smelled the scent of decaying leaves, the heady perfume of hepaticas and bloodroot and spidery windflower, the quick, sharp odor of the new leaf, of the woods in early spring.

"Maybe some day—" he said.

"Yeab, I know," said Shadow. "Maybe some day the wolves will be civilized, too. And the rabbits and squirrels and all the other wild things. The way you dogs go mooning around—"

"It isn't mooning," Ebenezer told him. "Dreaming, maybe. Men used to dream. They used to sit around and think up things. That's how we happened. A man named Webster thought us up. He

messed around with us. He fixed up our throats so we could talk. He rigged up contact lenses so that we could read. He—"

"A lot of good it did men for all their dreaming," said Shadow, peevishly.

And that, thought Ebenezer, is the solemn truth. Not many men left now, just the mutants squatting in their towers and doing God knows what and the little colony of real men still living in Geneva. The others, long ago, had gone to Jupiter. Had gone to Jupiter and changed themselves into things that were not human.

Slowly, tail drooping, Ebenezer swung around, clumped slowly up the path.

Too bad about the rabbit, he thought. It had been such a nice rabbit. It had run so well. And it really wasn't scared. He had chased it lots of times and it knew he wouldn't catch it.

But even at that, Ebenezer couldn't bring himself to blame the wolf. To a wolf a rabbit wasn't just something that was fun to chase. For the wolf had no herds for meat and milk, no fields of grain for meal to make dog biscuits.

"What I ought to do," grumbled the remorseless Shadow, treading at his heels, "is tell Jenkins that you ran out. You know that you should be listening."

Ebenezer did not answer, kept on trudging up the trail. For what Shadow said was true. Instead of rabbit-chasing, he should have been sitting up at Webster House listening—listening for the things that came to one—sounds and scents and awareness of something that was near. Like listening on one side of a wall to the things that were happening on the other, only they were faint and sometimes far away and hard to catch. Even harder, most times, to understand.

It's the animal in me, thought Ebenezer. The old flea-scratching, bone-chewing, gopher-digging dog that will not let me be—that sends me sneaking out to chase a rabbit when I should be listening, out prowling the forest when I should be reading the old books from the shelves that line the study wall.

Too fast, he told himself. We came up too fast. Had to come up too fast.

It took Man thousands of years to turn his grunts into the rudiments of speech. Thousands of years to discover fire and thousands more of years to invent the bow and arrow—thousands of years to learn to till the soil and harvest food, thousands of years to forsake the cave for a house he built himself. . . .

But in a little more than a thousand

years from the day we learned to talk we were on our own—our own, that is, except for Jenkins.

The forest thinned out into gnarled, scattered oaks that straggled up the hill, like hobbling old men who had wandered off the path.

The house stood on the hilltop, a huddled structure that had taken root and crouched close against the earth. So old that it was the color of the things around it, of grass and flowers and trees, of sky and wind and weather. A house built by men who loved it and the surrounding acres even as the dogs now loved them. Built and lived in and died in by a legendary family that had left a meteoric trail across centuries of time. Men who lent their shadows to the stories that were told around the blazing fireplace of stormy nights when the wind sucked along the eaves. Stories of Bruce Webster and the first dog, Nathaniel; of a man named Grant who had given Nathaniel a word to pass along; of another man who had tried to reach the stars and of the old man who had sat waiting for him in the wheelchair on the lawn. And other stories of the ogre mutants the dogs had watched for years.

And now the men had gone and the family was a name and the dogs carried on as Grant had told Nathaniel that far-gone day they must.

As if you were men, as if the dog were man. Those were the words that had been handed down for ten full centuries—and at last the time had come.

The dogs had come home when the men had gone, come from the far corners of the earth back to the place where the first dog had spoken the first word, where the first dog had read the first line of print—back to Webster House where a man, long ago, had dreamed of a dual civilization, of man and dog going down the ages, hand in paw.

"We've done the best we could," said Ebenezer, almost as if he were speaking to someone. "We still are doing it."

From the other side of the hill came the tinkle of a cow bell, a burst of frantic barking. The pups were hringing in the cows for the evening milking.

The dust of centuries lay within the vault, a gray, powdery dust that was not an alien thing, but a part of the place itself—the part that had died in the passing of the years.

Jon Webster smelled he acrid scent of the dust cutting through the mustiness of the room, heard the silence humming

like a song within his head. One dim radium bulb glowed above the panel with its switch and wheel and half a dozen dials.

Fearful of disturbing the sleeping silence, Webster moved forward quietly, half awed by the weight of time that seemed to press down from the ceiling. He reached out a finger and touched the open switch, as if he had expected it might not be there, as if he must feel the pressure of it against his fingertip to know that it was there.

And it was there. It and the wheel and dials, with the single light above them. And that was all. There was nothing else. In all that small, bare vault there was nothing else.

Exactly as the old map had said that it would be.

Jon Webster shook his head, thinking: I might have known that it would have been. The map was right. The map remembered. We were the ones that had forgotten—forgotten or never known or never cared. And he knew that more than likely it was the last that would be right. Never cared.

Although it was probable that very few had ever known about this vault. Had never known because it was best that only few should know. That it never had been used was no factor in its secrecy. There might have been a day—

He stared at the panel, wondering. Slowly his hand reached out again and then he jerked it back. Better not, he told himself, better not. For the map had given no clue to the purpose of the vault, to the mechanics of the switch.

"Defense," the map had said, and that was all.

Defense! Of course, there would have been defense back in that day of a thousand years ago. A defense that never had been needed, but a defense that had to be there, a defense against the emergency of uncertainty. For the brotherhood of peoples even then was a shaky thing that a single word or act might have thrown out of kilter. Even after ten centuries of peace, the memory of war would have been a living thing—an ever-present possibility in the mind of the world committee, something to be circumvented, something to be ready for.

Webster stood stiff and straight, listening to the pulse of history beating in the room. History that had run its course and ended. History that had come to a dead end—a stream that suddenly had flowed into the backwater of a few hundred futile human lives and now was

a stagnant pool unrelieved by the eddying of human struggle and achievement.

He reached out a hand, put it flat against the masonry, felt the slimy cold, the rough crawl of dust beneath his palm.

The foundation of empire, he thought. The subcellar of empire. The nethermost stone of the towering structure that soared in proud strength on the surface far above—a great building that in olden times had hummed with the business of a solar system, an empire not in the sense of conquest but an empire of orderly human relations based on mutual respect and tolerant understanding.

A seat of human government lent an easy confidence by the psychological fact of an adequate and foolproof defense. For it would have been both adequate and foolproof, it would have had to be. The men of that day took no chances, overlooked no bets. They had come up through the hard school and they knew their way around.

Slowly, Webster swung about, stared at the trail his feet had left across the dust. Silently, stepping carefully, following the trail he'd made, he left the vault, closed the massive door behind him and spun the lock that held its secret fast.

Climbing the tunneled stairs, he thought: *Now I can write my history. My notes are almost complete and I know how it should go. It will be brilliant and exhaustive and it might be interesting if anyone should read it.*

But he knew that no one would. No one would take the time or care.

For a long moment, Webster stood on the broad marble steps before his house, looking down the street. A pretty street, he told himself, the prettiest street in all Geneva, with its boulevard of trees, its carefully tended flower beds, the walks that glistened with the scrub and polish of ever-working robots.

No one moved along the street and it wasn't strange. The robots had finished their work early in the day and there were few people.

From some high treetop a bird sang and the song was one with the sun and flowers, a glad song that strained at the bursting throat, a song that tripped and skinned with boundless joy.

A neat street drowsing in the sun and a great, proud city that had lost its purpose. A street that should be filled with laughing children and strolling lovers and old men resting in the sun. And a city, the last city on Earth, the only city on

Earth, that should be filled with noise and business.

A bird sang and a man stood on the steps and looked and the tulips nodded blissfully in the tiny fragrant breeze that wafted down the street.

Webster turned to the door, fumbled it open, walked across the threshold.

The room was hushed and solemn, cathedrallike with its stained glass windows and soft carpeting. Old wood glowed with the patina of age and silver and brass winked briefly in the light that fell from the slender windows. Over the fireplace hung a massive canvas, done in subdued coloring—a house upon a hill, a house that had grown roots and clung against the land with a jealous grip. Smoke came from the chimney, a wind-whipped, tenuous smoke that smudged across a storm-gray sky.

Webster walked across the room and there was no sound of walking. *The rugs, he thought, the rugs protect the quietness of the place. Randall wanted to do this one over, too, but I wouldn't let him touch it and I'm glad I didn't. A man must keep something that is old, something he can cling to, something that is a heritage and a legacy and promise.*

He reached his desk, thumbed a tumbler and the light came on above it. Slowly, he let himself into a chair, reached out for the portfolio of notes. He flipped the cover open and stared at the title page: *"A Study of the Functional Development of the City of Geneva."*

A brave title. Dignified and erudite. And a lot of work. Twenty years of work. Twenty years of digging among old dusty records, twenty years of reading and comparing, of evaluating the weight and words of those who had gone before, sifting and rejecting and working out the facts, tracing the trend not only of the city but of men. No hero worship, no legends, but facts. And facts are hard to come by.

Something rustled. No footstep, but a rustle, a sense that someone was near. Webster twisted in his chair. A robot stood just outside the circle of the desk light.

"Beg pardon, sir," the robot said, "but I was supposed to tell you. Miss Sara is waiting in the Seashore."

Webster started slightly. "Miss Sara, eh? It's been a long time since she's been here."

"Yes, sir," said the robot. "It seemed almost like old times, sir, when she walked in the door."

"Thank you, Roscoe, for telling me," said Webster. "I'll go right out. You will bring some drinks."

"She brought her own drinks, sir," said Roscoe. "Something that Mr. Ballentree fixed up."

"Ballentree!" exclaimed Webster. "I hope it isn't poison."

"I've been observing her," Roscoe told him, "and she's been drinking it and she's still all right."

Webster rose from his chair, crossed the room and went down the hall. He pushed open the door and the sound of the surf came to him. He blinked in the light that shone on the hot sand beach, stretching like a straight white line to either horizon. Before him the ocean was a sun-washed blue tipped with the white of foaming waves.

Sand gritted underneath his feet as he walked forward, eyes adjusting themselves to the blaze of sunlight.

Sara, he saw, was sitting in one of the bright canvas chairs underneath the palm trees and beside the chair was a pastel, very ladylike jug.

The air had a tang of salt and the wind off the water was cool in the sun-warm air.

The woman heard him and stood up and waited for him, with her hands outstretched. He hurried forward, clasped the outstretched hands and looked at her.

"Not a minute older," he said. "As pretty as the day I saw you first."

She smiled at him, eyes very bright. "And you, Jon. A little gray around the temples. A little handsomer. That is all."

He laughed. "I'm almost sixty, Sara. Middle age is creeping up."

"I brought something," said Sara, "One of Ballentree's latest masterpieces. It will cut your age in half."

He grunted. "Wonder Ballentree hasn't killed off half Geneva, the drinks that he cooks up."

"This one is really good."

It was. It went down smooth and it had a strange, half metallic, half ecstatic taste.

Webster pulled another chair close to Sara's, sat down and looked at her.

"You have such a nice place here," said Sara. "Randall did it, didn't he?"

Webster nodded. "He had more fun than a circus. I had to beat him off with a club. And those robots of his! They're crazier than he is."

"But he does wonderful things. He did a Martian room for Quentin and its simply unworldly."

"I know," said Webster. "Was set on a deep-space one for here. Said it would be just the place to sit and think. Got sore at me when I wouldn't let him do it."

He rubbed the back of his left hand with his right thumb, staring off at the blue baze above the ocean. Sara leaned forward, pulled his thumb away.

"You still have the warts," she said.

He grinned. "Yes. Could have had them take off, but never got around to it. Too busy, I guess. Part of me by now."

She released the thumb and he went back to rubbing the warts absent-mindedly.

"You've been busy," she said. "Haven't seen you around much. How is the book coming?"

"Ready to write," said Webster. "Outlining it by chapters now. Checked on the last thing today. Have to make sure, you know. Place way down under the old Solar Administration Building. Some sort of a defense set-up. Control room. You push a lever and—"

"And what?"

"I don't know," said Webster. "Something effective, I suppose. Should try to find out, but can't find the heart to do it. Been digging around in too much dust these last twenty years to face any more."

"You sound discouraged, Jon. Tired. You shouldn't get tired. There's no reason for it. You should get around. Have another drink?"

He shook his head. "No, Sara, thanks. Not in the mood, I guess. I'm afraid, Sara—afraid."

"Afraid?"

"This room," said Webster. "Illusion. Mirrors that give an allusion of distance. Fans that blow the air through a salt spray, pumps that stir up the waves. A synthetic sun. And if I don't like the sun, all I have to do is snap a switch and I have a moon."

"Illusion," said Sara.

"That's it," said Webster. "That is all we have. No real work, no real job. Nothing that we're working for, no place we're going. I've worked for twenty years and I'll write a book and not a soul will read it. All they'd have to do would be spend the time to read it, but they won't take the time. They won't care. All they'd have to do would be come and ask me for a copy—and if they didn't want to do that I'd be so glad someone was going to read it that I'd take it to them. But no one will. It will go on the shelves with all the other books that have been written. And what do I get out of it? Wait . . .

I'll tell you. Twenty years of work, twenty years of fooling myself, twenty years of sanity."

"I know," said Sara, softly. "I know, Jon. The last three paintings—"

He looked up quickly. "But, Sara—"

She shook her head. "No, Jon. No one wanted them. They're out of style. Naturalistic stuff is passé. Impressionism now. Daubs—"

"We are too rich," said Webster. "We have too much. Everything was left for us—everything and nothing. When Mankind went out to Jupiter the few that were left behind inherited the Earth and it was too big for them. They couldn't handle it. They couldn't manage it. They thought they owned it, but they were the ones that were owned. Owned and dominated and awed by the things that had gone before."

She reached out a hand and touched his arm.

"Poor Jon," she said.

"We can't flinch away from it," he said. "Some day some of us must face the truth, must start over again—from scratch."

"I—"

"Yes, what is it, Sara?"

"I came here to say good-by."

"Good-by?"

"I'm going to take the Sleep."

He came to his feet, swiftly, horrified.

"No, Sara!"

She laughed and the laugh was strained. "Why don't you come with me, Jon. A few hundred years. Maybe it will all be different when we awake."

"Just because no one wants your canvases. Just because—"

"Because of what you said just a while ago. Illusion, Jon. I knew it, felt it, but I couldn't think it out."

"But the Sleep is illusion, too."

"I know. But you don't know it's illusion. You think it's real. You have no inhibitions and you have no fears except the fears that are planned deliberately. It's natural, Jon—more natural than life. I went up to the Temple and it was all explained to me."

"And when you awake?"

"You're adjusted. Adjusted to whatever life is like in whatever era you awake. Almost as if you belonged, even from the first. And it might be better. Who knows? It might be better."

"It won't be," Jon told her, grimly. "Until, or unless, someone does something about it. And a people that run to

the Sleep to hide are not going to bestir themselves."

She shrank back in the chair and suddenly he felt ashamed.

"I'm sorry, Sara. I didn't mean you. Nor any one person. Just the lot of us."

The palms whispered harshly, fronds rasping. Little pools of water, left by the surging tide, sparkled in the sun.

"I won't try to dissuade you," Webster said. "You've thought it out, you know what it is you want."

It hadn't always been like that with the human race, he thought. There would have been a day, a thousand years ago, when a man would have argued about a thing like this. But Juwainism had ended all the petty quarrels. Juwainism had ended lots of things.

"I've always thought," Sara told him, softly, "if we could have stayed together—"

He made a gesture of impatience. "It's just another thing we've lost, another thing that the human race let loose. Come to think it over, we lost a lot of things. Family ties and business, work and purpose."

He turned to face her squarely. "If you want to come back, Sara—"

She shook her head. "It wouldn't work, Jon. It's been too many years."

He nodded. There was no use denying it.

She rose and held out her hand. "If you ever decide to take the Sleep, find out my date. I'll have them reserve a place right next to me."

"I don't think I ever shall," he told her.

"All right, then. Good-by, Jon."

"Wait a second, Sara. You haven't said a word about our son. I used to see him often, but—"

She laughed brightly. "Tom's almost a grown man now, Jon. And it's the strangest thing. He—"

"I haven't seen him for so long," Webster said again.

"No wonder. He's scarcely in the city. It's his hobby. Something he inherited from you, I guess. Pioneering in a way. I don't know what else you'd call it."

"You mean some new research. Something unusual."

"Unusual, yes, but not research. Just goes out in the woods and lives by himself. He and a few of his friends. A bag of salt, a bow and arrows— Yes, it's queer," Sara admitted, "but he has a lot of fun. Claims he's learning something. And he does look healthy. Like a wolf. Strong and lean and a look about his eyes.

She swung around and moved away.

"I'll see you to the door," said Webster.

She shook her head. "No. I'd rather that you wouldn't."

"You're forgetting the jug."

"You keep it, Jon. I won't need it where I'm going."

Webster put on the plastic "thinking cap," snapped the button of the writer on his desk.

Chapter Twenty-six, he thought and the writer clicked and chuckled and wrote "Chapter XXVI."

For a moment Webster held his mind clear, assembling his data, arranging his outline, then he began again. The writer clicked and gurgled, hummed into steady work:

The machines ran on, tended by the robots as they had been before, producing all the things they had produced before.

And the robots worked as they knew it was their right to work, their right and duty, doing the things they had been made to do.

The machines went on and the robots went on, producing wealth as if there were men to use it, just as if there were millions of men instead of a bare five thousand.

And the five thousand who had stayed behind or who had been left behind suddenly found themselves the masters of a world that had been geared to the millions, found themselves possessed of the wealth and services that only months before had been the wealth and services that had been due the millions.

There was no government, but there was no need of government, for all the crimes and abuses that government had held in check were as effectively held in check by the sudden wealth the five thousand had inherited. No man will steal when he can pick up what he wants without the bother of thievery. No man will contest with his neighbor over real estate when the entire world is real estate for the simple taking. Property rights almost overnight became a phrase that had no meaning in a world where there was more than enough for all.

Crimes of violence long before had been virtually eliminated from human society and with the economic pressure eased to a point where property rights ceased to be a point of friction, there was no need of government. No need, in fact, of many of the encumbrances of custom and convenience which man had carried forward from the beginnings of commerce. There was no need of currency, for exchange had no meaning in a world where to get a thing one need but ask for it or take it.

Relieved of economic pressure, the social

pressures lessened, too. A man no longer found it necessary to conform to the standards and the acts of custom which had played so large a part in the post-Jovian world as an indication of commercial character.

Religion, which had been losing ground for centuries, entirely disappeared. The family unit, held together by tradition and by the economic necessity of a provider and protector, fell apart. Men and women lived together as they wished, parted when they wished. For there was no economic reason, no social reason why they shouldn't.

Webster cleared his mind and the machine purred softly at him. He put up his hands, took off the cap, reread the last paragraph of the outline.

There, he thought, there is the root of it. If the families had stayed together. If Sara and I had stayed together.

He rubbed the warts on the back of his hand, wondering: *Wonder if Tom goes by my name or hers. Usually they take their mother's name. I know I did at first until my mother asked me to change it. Said it would please my father and she didn't mind. Said he was proud of the name he bore and I was his only child. And she had others.*

If only we had stayed together. Then there'd be something worth living for. If we'd stayed together, Sara wouldn't be taking the Sleep, wouldn't be lying in a tank of fluid in suspended animation with the "dream cap" on her head.

Wonder what kind of dream she chose—what kind of synthetic life she picked out to live. I wanted to ask her, but I didn't dare. It's not the kind of thing, after all, that one can ask.

He reached out and picked up the cap again, put it on his head, marshaled his thoughts anew. The writer clicked into sudden life:

Man was bewildered. But not for long. Man tried. But not for long.

For the five thousand could not carry on the work of the millions who had gone to Jupiter to enter upon a better life in alien bodies. The five thousand did not have the skill, nor the dreams, nor the incentive.

And there were the psychological factors. The psychological factor of tradition which bore like a weight upon the minds of the men who had been left behind. The psychological factor of Juwainism which forced men to be honest with themselves and others, which forced men to perceive at last the hopelessness of the things they sought to do. Juwainism left no room for fake courage. And false, foolhardy courage that didn't know what it was going up

against was the one thing the five thousand needed most.

What they did suffered by comparison with what had been done before and at last they came to know that the human dream of millions was too vast a thing for five thousand to attempt.

Life was good. Why worry? There was food and clothes and shelter, human companionship and luxury and entertainment—there was everything that one could ever wish.

Man gave up trying. Man enjoyed himself. Human achievement became a zero factor and human life a senseless paradise.

Webster took off the cap again, reached out and clicked off the writer.

If someone would only read it once I get it done, he thought. If someone would read and understand. If someone could realize where human life is going.

I could tell them, of course. I could go out and buttonhole them one by one and hold them fast until I told them what I thought. And they would understand, for Juwainism would make them understand. But they wouldn't pay attention. They'd tuck it all away in the backs of their brains somewhere for future reference and they'd never have the time or take the trouble to drag it out again.

They'd go on doing the foolish things they're doing, following the footless hobbies they have taken up in lieu of work. Randall with his crew of zany robots going around begging to be allowed to re-design his neighbors' homes. Ballentree spending hours on end figuring out new alcoholic mixtures. Yes, and Jon Webster wasting twenty years digging into the history of a single city.

A door creaked faintly and Webster swung around. A robot catfooted into the room.

"Yes, what is it, Oscar?"

The robot halted, a dim figure in the half-light of the dusk-filled room.

"It's time for dinner, sir. I came to see—"

"Whatever you can think up," said Webster. "And, Oscar, you can lay the fire."

"The fire is laid, sir."

Oscar stalked across the room, bent above the fireplace. Flame flickered in his hand and the kindling caught.

Webster slouched in his chair, staring at the flames crawling up the wood, heard the first, faint hiss and crackle of the wood, the suction mumble at the fireplace throat.

"It's pretty, sir," said Oscar.

"You like it, too?"

"Indeed I do."

"Ancestral memories," said Webster, soberly. "Remembrance of the forge that made you."

"You think so, sir?" asked Oscar.

"No, Oscar, I was joking. Anachronisms, that's what you and I are. Not many people have fires these days. No need for them. But there's something about them, something that is clean and comforting."

He stared at the canvas above the mantelpiece, lighted now by the flare of burning wood. Oscar saw his stare.

"Too bad about Miss Sara, sir."

Webster shook his head. "No, Oscar, it was something that she wanted. Like turning off one life and starting on another. She will lie up there in the Temple, asleep for years, and she will live another life. And this one, Oscar, will be a happy life. For she would have it planned that way."

His mind went back to other days in this very room.

"She painted that picture, Oscar," he said. "Spent a long time at it, being very careful to catch the thing she wanted to express. She used to laugh at me and tell me I was in the painting, too."

"I don't see you, sir," said Oscar.

"No, I'm not. And yet, perhaps, I am. Or part of me. Part of what and where I came from. That house in the painting, Oscar, is the Webster House in North America. And I am a Webster. But a long ways from the house—a long ways from the men who built that house."

"North America's not so far, sir."

"No," Webster told him. "Not so far in distance. But far in other ways."

He felt the warmth of the fire steal across the room and touch him.

Far. Too far—and in the wrong direction.

The robot mover softly, feet padding on the rug, leaving the room.

She worked a long time, being very careful to catch the thing she wanted to express.

And what was that thing? He had never asked her and she had never told him. He had always thought, he remembered, that it probably had been the way the smoke streamed, wind-whipped across the sky, the way the house crouched against the ground, blending in with the trees and grass, huddled against the storm that walked above the land.

But it may have been something else. Some symbolism. Something that made the house synonymous with the kind of men who built it.

He got up and walked closer, stood before the fire with head tilted back. The brush strokes were there and the painting looked less a painting than when viewed from the proper distance. A thing of technique, now. The basic strokes and shadings the brushes had achieved to create illusion.

Security. Security by the way the house stood foursquare and solid. Tenacity by the way it was a part of the land itself. Sternness, stubbornness and a certain bleakness of the spirit.

She had sat for days on end with the visor beamed on the house, sketching carefully, painting slowly, often sitting and watching and doing nothing at all. There had been dogs, she said, and robots, but she had not put them in, because all she wanted was the house. One of the few houses left standing in the open country. Through centuries of neglect, the others had fallen in, had given the land back to the wilderness.

But there were dogs and robots in this one. One big robot, she had said, and a lot of little ones.

Webster had paid no attention—he had been too busy.

He swung around, went back to the desk again.

Queer thing, once you came to think of it. Robots and dogs living together. A Webster once had messed around with dogs, trying to put them on the road to a culture of their own, trying to develop a dual civilization of man and dog.

Bits of remembrance came to him—tiny fragments, half recalled, of the legends that had come down the years about the Webster house. There had been a robot named Jenkins who had served the family from the very first. There had been an old man sitting in a wheel chair on the front lawn, staring at the stars and waiting for a son who never came. And a curse had hung above the house, the curse of having lost to the world the philosophy of Juwain.

The visor was in one corner of the room, an almost forgotten piece of furniture, something that was scarcely used. There was no need to use it. All the world was here in the city of Geneva.

Webster rose, moved toward it, stopped and thought. The dial settings were listed in the log book, but where was the log book? More than likely somewhere in his desk.

He went back to the desk, started going through the drawers.

Excited now, he pawed furiously, like a terrier digging for a bone.

Jenkins, the ancient robot, scrubbed his metallic chin with metallic fingers. It was a thing he did when he was deep in thought, a meaningless, irritating gesture he had picked up from long association with the human race.

His eyes went back to the little dog sitting on the floor beside him.

"So the wolf was friendly," said Jenkins. "Offered you the rabbit."

Ebenezer jiggled excitedly upon his bottom. "He was one of them we fed last winter. The pack that came up to the house and we tried to tame them."

"Would you know the wolf again?"

Ebenezer nodded. "I got his scent," he said. "I'd remember him."

Shadow shuffled his feet against the floor. "Look, Jenkins, ain't you going to smack him one? He should have been listening and he ran away. He had no business chasing rabbits—"

Jenkin spoke sternly. "You're the one that should get the smacking, Shadow. For your attitude. You are assigned to Ebenezer, you should be part of him. You aren't an individual. You're just Ebenezer's hands. If he had hands, he'd have no need of you. You aren't his mentor nor his conscience. Just his hands. Remember that."

Shadow shuffled his feet rebelliously. "I'll run away," he said.

"Join the wild robots I suppose," said Jenkins.

Shadow nodded. "They'd be glad to have me. They're doing things. They need all the help that they can get."

"They'd bust you up for scrap," Jenkins told him sourly. "You have no training, no abilities that would make you one of them."

He turned to Ebenezer. "We have other robots."

Ebenezer shook his head. "Shadow is all right. I can handle him. We know one another. He keeps me from getting lazy, keeps me on my toes."

"That's fine," said Jenkins. "You two run along. And if you ever happen to be out chasing rabbits, Ebenezer, and run onto this wolf again, try to cultivate him."

The rays of the westerling sun were streaming through the windows, touching the age-old room with the warmth of a late spring evening.

Jenkins sat quietly in the chair, listening to the sounds that came from outside—the tinkle of cowbells, the yapping of the puppies, the ringing thud of an ax splitting fireplace logs.

Poor little fellow, thought Jenkins. Sneaking out to chase a rabbit when he

should have been listening. Too far, too fast. Have to watch that. Have to keep them from breaking down. Come fall and we'll knock off work for a week or two and have some coon hunts. Do them a world of good.

Although there'd come a day when there'd be no coon hunts, no rabbit chasing—the day when the dogs finally had tamed everything, when all the wild things would be thinking, talking, working beings. A wild dream and a far one—but, thought Jenkins, no wilder and no farther than some of the dreams of man.

Maybe even better than the dreams of man, for they held none of the ruthlessness that the human race had planned, aimed at none of the mechanistic brutality the human race spawned.

A new civilization, a new culture, a new way of thought. Mystic, perhaps, and visionary, but so had man been visionary. Probing into mysteries that man had brushed by as unworthy of his time, as mere superstition that could have no scientific basis.

Things that go bump in the night. Things that prowl around a house and the dogs get up and growl and there are no tracks in the snow. Dogs howling when someone dies.

The dogs knew. The dogs had known long before they had been given tongues to talk, contact lenses to read. They had not come along the road as far as men—they were not cynical and skeptic. They believed the things they heard and sensed. They did not invent superstition as a form of wishful thinking, as a shield against the things unseen.

Jenkins turned back to the desk again, picked up the pen, bent above the notebook in front of him. The pen screeched as he pushed it along.

Ebenezer reports friendliness in wolf. Recommend council detach Ebenezer from listening and assign him to contact the wolf.

Wolves, mused Jenkins, would be good friends to have. They'd make splendid scouts. Better than the dogs. Tougher, faster, sneaky. They could watch the wild robots across the river and relieve the dogs. Could keep an eye on the mutant castles.

Jenkins shook his head. Couldn't trust anyone these days. The robots seemed to be all right. Were friendly, dropped in at times, helped out now and then. Real neighborly, in fact. But you never knew. And they were building machines.

The mutants never bothered anyone, were scarcely seen, in fact. But they had to be watched, too. Never knew what devilment they might be up to. Remember what they'd done to man. That dirty trick with Juwainism, handing it over at a time when it would doom the race.

Men. They were gods to us and now they're gone. Left us on our own. A few in Geneva, of course, but they can't be bothered, have no interest in us.

He sat in the twilight, thinking of the whiskies he had carried, of the errands he had run, of the days when Websters had lived and died within these walls.

And now—father confessor to the dogs. Cute little devils and bright and smart—and trying hard.

A hell buzzed softly and Jenkins jerked upright in his seat. It buzzed again and a green light winked on the televisor. Jenkins came to his feet, stood unbelieving, staring at the winking light.

Someone calling!

Someone calling after almost a thousand years!

He staggered forward, dropped into the chair, reached out with fumbling fingers to the toggle, tripped it over.

The wall before him melted away and he sat facing a man across a desk. Behind the man the flames of a fireplace lighted up a room with high, stained-glass windows.

"You're Jenkins," said the man and there was something in his face that jerked a cry from Jenkins.

"You . . . you—"

"I'm Jon Webster," said the man.

Jenkins pressed his hands flat against the top of the televisor, sat straight and stiff, afraid of the unrobotlike emotions that welled within his metal being.

"I would have known you anywhere," said Jenkins. "You have the look of them. I should recognize one of you. I worked for you long enough. Carried drinks and . . . and—"

"Yes, I know," said Webster. "Your name has come down with us. We remembered you."

"You are in Geneva, Jon?" and then Jenkins remembered. "I meant, sir."

"No need of it," said Webster. "I'd rather have it Jon. And, yes, I'm in Geneva. But I'd like to see you. I wonder if I might."

"You mean come out here?"

Webster nodded.

"But the place is overrun with dogs, sir."

Webster grinned. "The talking dogs?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jenkins, "and they'll be glad to see you. They know all about the family. They sit around at night and talk themselves to sleep with stories from the old days and . . . and—"

"What is it, Jenkins?"

"I'll be glad to see you, too. It has been so lonesome!"

God had come.

Ebenezer shivered at the thought, crouching in the dark. *If Jenkins knew I was here, he thought, he'd whale my hide for fair. Jenkins said we were to leave him alone, for a while, at least.*

Ebenezer crept forward on fur-soft pads, sniffed at the study door. And the door was open—open by the barest crack!

He crouched on his belly, listening, and there was not a thing to hear. Just a scent, an unfamiliar, tangy scent that made the hair crawl along his back in swift, almost unbearable ecstasy.

He glanced quickly over his shoulder, but there was no movement. Jenkins was out in the dining room, telling the dogs how they must behave, and Shadow was off somewhere tending to some robot business.

Softly, carefully, Ebenezer pushed at the door with his nose and the door swung wider. Another push and it was half open.

The man sat in front of the fireplace, in the easy-chair, long legs crossed, hands clasped across his stomach.

Ebenezer crouched tighter against the floor, a low involuntary whimper in his throat.

At the sound Jon Webster jerked erect.

"Who's there?" he asked.

Ebenezer froze against the floor, felt the pumping of his heart jerking at his body.

"Who's there?" Webster asked once more and then he saw the dog.

His voice was softer when he spoke again. "Come in, feller. Come on in."

Ebenezer did not stir.

Webster snapped his fingers at him. "I won't hurt you. Come on in. Where are all the others?"

Ebenezer tried to rise, tried to crawl along the floor, but his bones were rubber and his blood was water. And the man was striding toward him, coming in long strides across the floor.

He saw the man hanging over him, felt strong hands beneath his body, knew that

he was being lifted up. And the scent that he had smelled at the open door—the overpowering god-scent—was strong within his nostrils.

The hands held him tight against the strange fabric the man wore instead of fur and a voice crooned at him—no words, but comforting.

"So you came to see me," said Jon Webster. "You sneaked away and you came to see me."

Ebenezer nodded weakly. "You aren't angry, are you? You aren't going to tell Jenkins?"

Webster shook his head. "No, I won't tell Jenkins."

He sat down and Ebenezer sat in his lap, staring at his face—a strong, lined face with the lines deepened by the flare of the flames within the fireplace.

Webster's hand came up and stroked Ebenezer's head and Ebenezer whimpered with drowsy happiness.

"It's like coming home," said Webster and he wasn't talking to the dog. "It's like you've been away for a long, long time and then you come home again. And it's so long you don't recognize the place. Don't know the furniture, don't recognize the floor plan. But you know by the feel of it that it's an old familiar place and you are glad you came."

"I like it here," said Ebenezer and he meant Webster's lap, but the man misunderstood.

"Of course, you do," he said. "It's your home as well as mine. More your home, in fact, for you stayed here and took care of it while I forgot about it."

He patted Ebenezer's head and pulled Ebenezer's ears.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Ebenezer."

"And what do you do, Ebenezer?"

"I listen."

"You listen?"

"Sure, that's my job. I listen for the cobbles."

"And you hear the cobbles?"

"Sometimes. I'm not very good at it. I think about chasing rabbits and I don't pay attention."

"What do cobbles sound like?"

"Different things. Sometimes they walk and other times they just go bump. And once in a while they talk. Although often, they think."

"Look here, Ebenezer, I don't seem to place these cobbles."

"They aren't any place," said Ebenezer. "Not on this earth, at least."

"I don't understand."

"Like there was a big house," said

Ebenezer. "A big house with lots of rooms. And doors between the rooms. And if you're in one room, you can hear whoever's in the other rooms, but you can't get to them."

"Sure you can," said Webster. "All you have to do is go out the door."

"But you can't open the door," said Ebenezer. "You don't even know about the door. You think this one room you're in is the only room in all the house. Even if you did know about the door you couldn't open it."

"You're talking about dimensions."

Ebenezer wrinkled his forehead in worried thought. "I don't know that word you said. Dimensions. What I told you was the way Jenkins told it to us. He said it wasn't really a house and it wasn't really rooms and the things we heard probably weren't like us."

Webster nodded to himself. That was the way one would have to do. Have to take it easy. Take it slow. Don't confuse them with big names. Let them get the idea first and then bring in the more exact and scientific terminology. And more than likely it would be a manufactured terminology. Already there was a coined word. Cobblies—the things behind the wall, the things that one hears and cannot identify—the dwellers in the next room.

Cobblies.

The cobbles will get you if you don't watch out.

That would be the human way. Can't understand a thing. Can't see it. Can't test it. Can't analyze it. O.K., it isn't there. It doesn't exist. It's a ghost, a goblin, a cobbly.

The cobbles will get you—

It's simpler that way, more comfortable. Scared? Sure, but you forget it in the light. And it doesn't plague you, haunt you. Think hard enough and you wish it away. Make it a ghost or goblin and you can laugh at it—in the daylight.

A hot, wet tongue rasped across his chin and Ebenezer wriggled with delight.

"I like you," said Ebenezer. "Jenkins never held me this way. No one's ever held me this way."

"Jenkins is busy," said Webster.

"He sure is," agreed Ebenezer. "He writes things down in a book. Things that us dogs hear when we are listening and things that we should do."

"You've heard about the Websters?" asked the man.

"Sure. We know all about them. You're

a Webster. We didn't think there were any more of them."

"Yes there is," said Webster. "There's been one here all the time. Jenkins is a Webster."

"He never told us that."

"He wouldn't."

The fire had died down and the room had darkened. The sputtering flames chased feeble flickers across the walls and floor.

And something else. Faint rustlings, faint whisperings, as if the very walls were talking. An old house with long memories and a lot of living tucked within its structure. Two thousand years of living. Built to last and it had lasted. Built to be a home and it still was a home—a solid place that put its arms around one and held one close and warm, claimed one for its own.

Footsteps walked across his brain—footsteps from the long ago, footsteps that had been silenced to the final echo centuries before. The walking of the Websters. Of the ones that went before me, the ones that Jenkins waited on from their day of birth to the hour of death.

History. Here is history. History stirring in the drapes and creeping on the floor, sitting in the corners, watching from the wall. Living history that a man can feel in the bones of him and against his shoulder blades—the impact of the long dead eyes that come back from the night.

Another Webster, eh! Doesn't look like much. Worthless. The breed's played out. Not like we were in our day. Just about the last of them.

Jon Webster stirred. "No, not the last of them," he said. "I have a son."

Well, it doesn't make much difference. He says he has a son. But he can't amount to much—

Webster started from the chair, Ebenezer slipping from his lap.

"That's not true," cried Webster. "My son—"

And then sat down again.

His son out in the woods with bow and arrows, playing a game, having fun.

A hobby. Sara had said before she had climbed the hill to take a hundred years or so of dreams.

A hobby. not a business. Not a way of life. Not necessity.

A hobby.

An artificial thing. A thing that had no beginning and no end. A thing a man could drop at any minute and no one would ever notice.

Like cooking up recipes for different kinds of drinks.

Like painting pictures no one wanted.

Like going around with a crew of crazy robots begging people to let you redecorate their homes.

Like writing history no one cares about.

Like playing Indian or caveman or pioneer with bow and arrows.

Like thinking up centuries-long dreams for men and women who are tired of life and yearn for fantasy.

The man sat in the chair, staring at the nothingness that spread before his eyes, the dread and awful nothingness that became tomorrow and tomorrow.

Absent-mindedly his hands came together and the right thumb stroked the back of the left hand.

Ebenezer crept forward through the fire-flared darkness, put his front paws on the man's knee and looked into his face.

"Hurt your hand?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"Hurt your hand? You're rubbing it."

Webster laughed shortly. "No, just warts." He showed them to the dog.

"Gee, warts!" said Ebenezer. "You don't want them, do you?"

"No," Webster hesitated. "No, I guess I don't. Never got around to having them taken off."

Ebenezer dropped his nose and nuzzled the back of Webster's hand.

"There you are," he announced triumphantly.

"There I'm what?"

"Look at the warts," invited Ebenezer.

A log fell in the fire and Webster lifted his hand, looked at it in the flare of light.

And the warts were gone. The skin was smooth and clean.

Jenkins stood in the darkness and listened to the silence, the soft sleeping silence that left the house to shadows, to the half-forgotten footsteps, the phrase spoken long ago, the tongues that murmured in the walls and rustled in the drapes.

By a single thought the night could have been as day, a simple adjustment in his lenses would have done the trick, but the ancient robot left his sight unchanged. For this was the way he liked it, this was the hour of meditation, the treasured time when the present sloughed away and the past came back and lived.

The others slept, but Jenkins did not sleep. For robots never sleep. Two

thousand years of consciousness, twenty centuries of full time unbroken by a single moment of unawareness.

A long time, thought Jenkins. A long time, even for a robot. For even before man had gone to Jupiter most of the older robots had been deactivated, had been sent to their death in favor of the newer models. The newer models that looked more like men, that were smoother and more sightly, with better speech and quicker responses within their metal brains.

But Jenkins had stayed on because he was an old and faithful servant, because Webster House would not have been home without him.

"They loved me," said Jenkins to himself. And the three words held deep comfort—comfort in a world where there was little comfort, a world where a servant had become a leader and longed to be a servant once again.

He stood at the window and stared out across the patio to the night-dark clumps of oaks that staggered down the hill. Darkness. No light anywhere. There had been a time when there had been lights. Windows that shone like friendly beams in the vast land that lay across the river.

But man had gone and there were no lights. The robots needed no lights, for they could see in darkness, even as Jenkins could have seen, had he but chose to do so. And the castles of the mutants were as dark by night as they were fear-some by day.

Now man had come again, one man. Had come, but he probably wouldn't stay. He'd sleep for a few nights in the great master bedroom on the second floor, then go back to Geneva. He'd walk the old forgotten acres and stare across the river and rummage through the books that lined the study wall, then he would up and leave.

Jenkins swung around. *Ought to see how he is, he thought. Ought to find if he needs anything. Maybe take him up a drink, although I'm afraid the whiskey is all spoiled. A thousand years is a long time for a bottle of good whiskey.*

He moved across the room and a warm peace came upon him, the close and intimate peacefulness of the old days when he had trotted, happy as a terrier, on his many errands.

He hummed a snatch of tune in minor key as he headed for the stairway.

He'd just look in and if Jon Webster were asleep, he'd leave, but if he wasn't, he'd say: "Are you comfortable, sir? Is

there anything you wish? A hot toddy, perhaps?"

And he took two stairs at the time.

For he was doing for a Webster again.

Jon Webster lay propped in bed, with the pillows piled behind him. The bed was hard and uncomfortable and the room was close and stuffy—not like his own bedroom back in Geneva, where one lay on the grassy bank of a murmuring stream and stared at the artificial stars that glittered in an artificial sky. And smelled the artificial scent of artificial lilacs that would go on blooming longer than a man would live. No murmur of a hidden waterfall, no flickering of captive fireflies—but a bed and room that were functional.

Webster spread his hands flat on his blanket covered thighs and flexed his fingers, thinking.

Ebenezer had merely touched the warts and the warts were gone. And it had been no happenstance—it had been intentional. It had been no miracle, but a conscious power. For miracles sometimes fail to happen, and Ebenezer had been sure.

A power, perhaps, that had been gathered from the room beyond, a power that had been stolen from the cobblestones Ebenezer listened to.

A laying-on of hands, a power of healing that involved no drugs, no surgery, but just a certain knowledge, a very special knowledge.

In the old dark ages certain men had claimed the power to make warts disappear, had bought them for a penny, or had traded them for something or had performed other mumbo jumbo—and in due time, sometimes, the warts would disappear.

Had these queer men listened to the cobblestones, too?

The door creaked just a little and Webster straightened suddenly.

A voice came out of the darkness: "Are you comfortable, sir? Is there anything you wish?"

"Jenkins?" asked Webster.

"Yes, sir," said Jenkins.

The dark form padded softly through the door.

"Yes, there's something I want," said Webster. "I want to talk to you."

He stared at the dark, metallic figure that stood beside the bed.

"About the dogs," said Webster.

"They try so hard," said Jenkins. "And it's hard for them. For they have no one, you see. Not a single soul."

"They have you."

Jenkins shook his head. "But I'm not

enough, you see. I'm just . . . well, a sort of mentor. It is men they want. The need of men is ingrown in them. For thousands of years it has been man and dog. Man and dog, hunting together. Man and dog, watching the herds together. Man and dog, fighting their enemies together. The dog watching while the man slept and the man dividing the last bit of food, going hungry himself so that his dog might eat."

Webster nodded. "Yes, I suppose that is the way it is."

"They talk about men every night," said Jenkins, "before they go to bed. They sit around together and one of the old ones tells one of the stories that have been handed down and they sit and wonder, sit and hope."

"But where are they going? What are they trying to do? Have they got a plan?"

"I can detect one," said Jenkins. "Just a faint glimmer of what may happen. They are psychic, you see. Always have been. They have no mechanical sense, which is understandable, for they have no hands. Where man would follow metal, the dogs will follow ghosts."

"Ghosts?"

"The things you men call ghosts. But they aren't ghosts. I'm sure of that. They're something in the next room. Some other form of life on another plane."

"You mean there may be many planes of life coexisting simultaneously upon Earth?"

Jenkins nodded. "I'm beginning to believe so, sir. I have a notebook full of things the dogs have heard and seen and now, after all these many years, they begin to make a pattern."

He hurried on. "I may be mistaken, sir. You understand I have no training. I was just a servant in the old days, sir. I tried to pick up things after . . . after Jupiter, but it was hard for me. Another robot helped me make the first little robots for the dogs and now the little ones produce their own kind in the workshop when there are need of more."

"But the dogs—they just sit and listen."

"Oh, no, sir, they do many other things. They try to make friends with the animals and they watch the wild robots and the mutants—"

"These wild robots? There are many of them."

Jenkins nodded. "Many, sir. Scattered all over the world in little camps. The ones that were left behind, sir. The ones man had no further use for when he went

to Jupiter. They have banded together and they work—"

"Work. What at?"

"I don't know, sir. Building machines, mostly. Mechanical, you know. I wonder what they'll do with all the machines they have. What they plan to use them for."

"So do I," said Webster.

And he stared into the darkness and wondered—wondered how man, cooped up in Geneva, should have lost touch with the world. How man should not have known about what the dogs were doing, about the little camps of busy robots, about the castles of the feared and hated mutants.

We lost touch, Webster thought. We locked the world outside. We created ourselves a little niche and we huddled in it—in the last city in the world. And we didn't know what was happening outside the city—we could have known, we should have known, but we didn't care.

It's time, he thought, that we took a hand again.

We were lost and awed and at first we tried, but finally we just threw in the hand.

For the first time the few that were left realized the greatness of the race, saw for the first time the mighty works the hand of man had reared. And they tried to keep it going and they couldn't do it. And they rationalized—as man rationalizes almost everything. Fooling himself that there really are no ghosts, calling things that go bumping in the night the first suave, sleek work of exclamation that comes into his mind.

We couldn't keep it going and so we rationalized, we took refuge in a screen of words and Juwainism helped us do it. We came close to ancestor worship. We sought to glorify the race of man. We couldn't carry on the work of man and so we tried to glorify it, attempted to enthrone the men who had. As we attempt to glorify and enthrone all good things that die.

We became a race of historians and we dug with grubby fingers in the ruins of the race, clutching each irrelevant little fact to our breast as if it were a priceless gem. And that was the first phase, the hobby that bore us up when we knew ourselves for what we really were—the dregs in the tilted cup of humanity.

But we got over it. Oh, sure, we got over it. In about one generation. Man is an adaptable creature—he can survive anything. So we couldn't build great spaceships. So we couldn't reach the stars.

So we couldn't puzzle out the secret of life. So what?

We were the inheritors, we had been left the legacy, we were better off than any race had ever been or could hope to be again. And so we rationalized once more and we forgot about the glory of the race, for while it was a shining thing, it was a toilsome and humiliating concept.

"Jenkins," said Webster, soberly, "we've wasted ten whole centuries."

"Not wasted, sir," said Jenkins. "Just resting, perhaps. But now, maybe, you can come out again. Come back to us."

"You want us?"

"The dogs need you," Jenkins told him. "And the robots, too. For both of them were never anything other than the servants of man. They are lost without you. The dogs are building a civilization, but it is building slowly."

"Perhaps a better civilization than we built ourselves," said Webster. "Perhaps a more successful one. For ours was not successful, Jenkins."

"A kinder one," Jenkins admitted, "but not too practical. A civilization based on the brotherhood of animals—on the psychic understanding and perhaps eventual communication and intercourse with interlocking worlds. A civilization of the mind and of understanding, but not too positive. No actual goals, limited mechanics—just a groping after truth, and the groping is in a direction that man passed by without a second glance."

"And you think that man could help?"

"Man could give leadership," said Jenkins.

"The right kind of leadership?"

"That is hard to answer."

Webster lay in the darkness, rubbed his suddenly sweating hands along the blankets that covered his body.

"Tell me the truth," he said and his words were grim. "Man could give leadership, you say. But man also could take over once again. Could discard the things the dogs are doing as impractical. Could round the robots up and use their mechanical ability in the old, old pattern. Both the dogs and robots would knuckle down to man."

"Of course," said Jenkins. "For they were servants once. But man is wise—man knows best."

"Thank you, Jenkins," said Webster. "Thank you very much."

He stared into the darkness and the truth was written there.

His track still lay across the floor and the smell of dust was a sharpness in the air. The radium bulb glowed above the panel and the switch and wheel and dials were waiting, waiting against the day when there would be need of them.

Webster stood in the doorway, smelled the dampness of the stone through the dusty bitterness.

Defense, he thought, staring at the switch. Defense—a thing to keep one out, a device to seal off a place against all the real or imagined weapons that a hypothetical enemy might bring to bear.

And undoubtedly the same defense that would keep an enemy out would keep the defended in. Not necessarily, of course, but—

He strode across the room and stood before the switch and his hand went out and grasped it, moved it slowly and knew that it would work.

Then his arm moved quickly and the switch shot home. From far below came a low, soft hissing as machines went into action. The dial needles flickered and stood out from the pins.

Webster touched the wheel with hesitant fingertips, stirred it on its shaft and the needles flickered again and crawled across the glass. With a swift, sure hand, Webster spun the wheel and the needles slammed against the farther pins.

He turned abruptly on his heel, marched out of the vault, closed the door behind him, climbed the crumbling steps.

Now if it only works, he thought. If it only works. His feet quickened on the steps and the blood hammered in his head.

If it only works!

He remembered the hum of machines far below as he had slammed the switch. That meant that the defense mechanism—or at least part of it—still worked.

But even if it worked, would it do the trick? What if it kept the enemy out, but failed to keep men in?

What if—

When he reached the street, he saw that the sky had changed. A gray, metallic overcast had blotted out the sun and the city lay in twilight, only half relieved by the automatic street lights. A faint breeze wafted at his cheek.

The crinkly gray ash of the burned notes and the map that he had found still lay in the fireplace and Webster strode across the room, seized the poker, stirred the ashes viciously until there was no hint of what they once had been.

Gone, he thought. The last clue gone. Without the map, without the knowledge of the city that it had taken him twenty years to ferret out, no one would ever find that hidden room with the switch and wheel and dials beneath the single lamp.

No one would know exactly what had happened. And even if one guessed, there'd be no way to make sure. And even if one were sure, there'd be nothing that could be done about it.

A thousand years before it would not have been that way. For in that day man, given the faintest hint, would have puzzled out any given problem.

But man had changed. He had lost the old knowledge and old skills. His mind had become a flaccid thing. He lived from one day to the next without any shining goal. But he still kept the old vices—the vices that had become virtues from his own viewpoint and raised him by his own bootstraps. He kept the unwavering belief that his was the only kind, the only life that mattered—the smug egoism that made him the self-appointed lord of all creation.

Running feet went past the house on the street outside and Webster swung away from the fireplace, faced the blind panes of the high and narrow windows.

I got them stirred up, he thought. Got them running now. Excited. Wondering what it's all about. For centuries they haven't stirred outside the city, but now that they can't get out—they're foaming at the mouth to do it.

His smile widened.

Maybe they'll be so stirred up, they'll do something about it. Rats in a trap will do some funny things—if they don't go crazy first.

And if they do get out—well, it's their right to do so. If they do get out, they've earned their right to take over once again.

He crossed the room, stood in the doorway for a moment, staring at the painting that hung above the mantel. Awkwardly, he raised his hand to it, a fumbling salute, a haggard good-by. Then he let himself out into the street and climbed the hill—the route that Sara had walked only days before.

The Temple robots were kind and

considerate, soft-footed and dignified. They took him to the place where Sara lay and showed him the next compartment that she had reserved for him.

"You will want to choose a dream," said the spokesman of the robots. "We can show you many samples. We can blend them to your taste. We can—"

"Thank you," said Webster. "I do not want a dream."

The robot nodded, understanding. "I see, sir. You only want to wait, to pass away the time."

"Yes," said Webster. "I guess you'd call it that."

"For about how long?"

"How long?"

"Yes. How long do you want to wait?"

"Oh, I see," said Webster. "How about forever?"

"Forever!"

"Forever is the word, I think," said Webster. "I might have said eternity, but it doesn't make much difference. There is no use of quibbling over two words that mean about the same."

"Yes, sir," said the robot.

No use of quibbling. No, of course, there wasn't. For he couldn't take the chance. He could have said a thousand years, but then he might have relented and gone down and flipped the switch.

And that was the one thing that must not happen. The dogs had to have their chance. Had to be left unhampered to try for success where the human race had failed. And so long as there was a human element they would not have that chance. For man would take over, would step in and spoil things, would laugh at the cobblers that talked behind a wall, would object to the taming and civilizing of the wild things of the earth.

A new pattern—a new way of thought and life—a new approach to the age-old social problem. And it must not be tainted by the stale breath of man's thinking.

The dogs would sit around at night when the work was done and they would talk of man. They would spin the old, old story and tell the old, old tales and man would be a god.

And it was better that way.

For a god can do no wrong.



TOWER OF DARKNESS

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

The planet was a deadly place—deadly not to men, but to their ambition. It seemed to be cursed by the Tower, and against the Tower neither strong will, courage, nor the flame of human ambition succeeded. It took something quite different—and unanswerable.

THE day had almost run its course when Manson eased the interstellar ship *Argo* down to the Port Ruthven landing field. It seemed to those in Control that *Argo* was dragging the sun, the swollen red orb that from distant Earth was a mere, tiny point of light, down the sky with her. As the ship lost altitude and crept down the long ladder of fire that was her main drive, as the rugged, serrated horizon rose all around her, so the sun dipped lower and lower towards the western hills. And when the slight, unavoidable shock forced them deep into the padding of their chairs, and when LeClerc, at a word from Captain Grant, reached out to switch off the interplanetary drive, the first of the jagged pinacles had reached up and implanted its black, irregular outline on the ruddy disk.

There was barometric equilibrium between ship and outside world. Somebody flipped over the switch that would open the control room ports. The thick, transparent circles slid to one side into the space between the inner and outer shells. The fresh air—air with all the taints inevitable in the atmospheric envelope of an inhabited world—tasted good. It was well water—ice-cold and chemically impure—after weeks with nothing but distilled water to drink. There was the smell of dust, of growing things, the acrid bite of frost.

From the fort, faint and silvery, nostalgic, drifted the notes of a bugle. There was silence, broken almost immediately by the dull thud of the sunset gun. The flag, lifted by the light evening breeze, black against the darkling sky, quivered at its halyards, slipped slowly and smoothly down its staff. The glaring lights came on around the landing field,

shouted man's challenge to the first, faint stars. From outside came the noise of whirring wheels, of loud voices. The spell was broken.

"That will do, gentlemen," said Grant.

Manson lit a cigarette, watched LeClerc, the navigator, putting the covers over his instruments.

He had grown to like the suave little Frenchman, during the trip, though by his rather austere standards, Manson tagged LeClerc as only two cuts above worthless. The little man had drifted happily from ship to ship, from planet to planet, carrying with him two reputations. One of them was that of being an accurate and reliable navigator. The other—well, that was given him by honky-tonk managers and high-society hostesses from old Sol to the Ridge and back.

Manson loosened his safety belt, got out of his chair and walked to the nearest port. From this he could see neither the administration buildings nor the fort, and he was looking away from the tiny settlement that was Port Ruthven.

"What's that, Frenchy?" he asked, his voice casual.

"That?"

The navigator snapped the cover of his plotting machine into place, walked, with his quick, short steps, to the other's side. He joined the chief pilot at the open port, stared with him towards the slender monolith that reared its graceful height into the dusky sky. Invisible it should have been, for not a light broke the severity of its outline and it was all of ten miles distant. But it was high, and the material of which it was built seemed the very quintessence of darkness. It stood out against the faint luminosity of the sky, the dim, flickering stars, and it

was as though it had been etched there on the very surface of the twilight, so sharp and distinct it was.

"I do not know," said LeClerc.

"You don't know?" Manson was mildly incredulous. "But you've been here before, Frenchy."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"So I have been here before, Bull. And yet I do not know. Look," he went to his hook rack, selected one of the *Pilots*, rapidly flicked over the pages until he came to the one he wanted. "Look! Read for yourself, my friend."

Manson took the volume.

"Port Ruthven," he read aloud. "Landmarks—To the north of the settlement, about ten miles distant, is a tower, standing two thousand five hundred feet from base to pinnacle. It is thought that it plays some part in the religious life of the natives. Ruthven reports that, although frank in all other matters, they displayed the utmost reticence when questioned about the remarkable building. It is called, in their language, *Tamar ur Cholon*—a literal translation of which is 'Tower of Darkness'—"

"Tower of Darkness," repeated LeClerc. "And if you will read on, my friend, you will find that astronauts are warned against displaying too much interest in the religious life of the aborigines. I knew one such who would not be warned—"

"What happened?"

"I do not know. He was missing for a few days. The commander of the Fort refused to act—after all, he had gone outside the settlement boundaries without an escort. And then he came back just an hour or so before sailing. And it seemed that something had gone out of him. He was normal enough—if you didn't look at his eyes. And he was quite capable of performing his routine duties. But—he wasn't interested. In anything. Two days out he came down with the sickness they call Darshan fever. It is rarely fatal. In this case it was."

"Why?"

"Again I do not know. But our surgeon said that the patient had no will to live. It was as though he was not interested even in staying alive."

"Interesting. Did he talk?"

"No. He could tell nobody of where he had been, what he had seen or done. He—"

"Skip it, Frenchy." Bull Manson stood before the open port a second or

so longer. The navigator thought that he saw the big broad frame shiver a little, although of that he could not be sure. And it may have been caused only by the cold night air, the drop in temperature of the well-heated compartment. "Skip it," said Manson again. "I'm a trouble shooter. There's trouble here, but it has more to do with human inefficiency than some one human's dam-foolishness. I can't mess with that kind of thing." Then—"What say we put on our number ones and see what the beach has to offer?"

"Very little, I fear. But the soles of my shoes are aching for the kiss of good, solid earth—and my eyes are crying out for figures of the kind I can't feed into my plotting machine. Let us go."

The dapper little man flung his arm over the shoulder of his big companion. Together they walked to the open hatchway, descended the wide ladder leading down into the body of the ship.

The pilot book will tell you that Port Ruthven has a Terran population of five thousand, that it stands on the south bank of the *Tamar ur Liran*—River of Darkness—and that its imports are all manner of Earthly manufactured goods, and its exports the *Chirin* weed and native works of art. And the book goes on to say that the fort commandant is, ex-officio, port captain, and that the civil government consists of a council of twelve elected members under an elected mayor, and that there is a hospital with five hundred beds, and that there is infrequent road and air communication with other parts of Darsha and a frequent spaceship service to all colonized sectors of the Galaxy.

But the hald words of the pilot book cannot call into life the picture of an outpost set among the more distant stars. Not that this is much loss. All such small colonies are the same—a huddle of plastic buildings, somehow just failing to achieve the grace and beauty of design intended by their builders, garish and cheap against their alien surroundings. And there is the pathetic hunger for news from Earth, and for such luxuries—small in fact but bulking big in the artificial environment—as cigarettes and cosmetics, films and fashion books. And there is the continual rivalry between civil and military governments, between mayor and fort commandant, the friction and the scandal and the ill feeling.

There is entertainment to be had—

crude and raw as befits those for whom it is intended. Not only spacemen straight from the darkness and loneliness of the interstellar deeps—they are a philosophical breed and take whatever is offered in the way of diversion, provided that it is not too much trouble for them to go and find it. But also the people of a city under siege—for that is all that such outposts are. The investing armies may not be corporeal—but the material is only one aspect of reality. There is the omnipresent sense of strangeness, of alienage, the misshapen, unrecognizable constellations marching in straggling procession across the night sky. And under the light of strange suns all things are strange—wives and husbands, friends and children.

And all this pales into insignificance beside the fact that—more often than not—the Terrestrials are themselves aliens, a mere handful of barely tolerated alien life among the teeming millions indigenous to the planet. They must walk carefully and speak fair to the beings amongst whom their lot is cast. They tremble always upon the brink of the massacre that will follow hard upon the heels of real or imagined insult, the whim of some savage ruler. If there should be trouble—if exports, or trade percentages, should fall below those expected, they knew that it would be investigated, even as Darsha was being investigated. They know vaguely that the arm of the Terran Central Government is long and realize with a dreadful clarity that its action is not instantaneous.

But there is entertainment to be had—crude and raw as befits those for whom it is intended.

In a pavilion hard by the darkly swirling *Tamar ur Liran* sat LeClerc and Manson. A bottle was on the table before them. The air was blue with tobacco smoke and with the softly scented fumes of the *Chirin* weed. The convoluted clouds and spirals of smoke shook and quivered to the harsh, rhythmic cacophony of the shinningly perspiring negro band. On the stage a red-haired girl was dancing—dancing and casting her sequin-studded veils from her one by one. The scene was as old as man.

"We could be two of Hanno's Phoenicians just back from the circumnavigation of Africa," said Manson softly.

LeClerc did not hear. To him the girl on the stage was woman, the throbbing of the drums the eternal beating of the heart of the race.

Manson started to speak again, then thought better of it. He refilled his glass from the bottle, lit a fresh cigarette and sat well back in his chair. He did not look at the stage—he had seen it all too many times before. He had seen the people too many times before as well—but they, unlike the girl on the stage, were not acting, were not pretending a virginal rapture of the dance that they could never feel. He was seeing them unguarded, with all screens down. What he saw was not particularly inspiring—but it was real.

He let his glance rove over the crowded room, the tables, each with its little circle of unsatisfied pleasure seekers. He saw fellow officers from *Argo*, soldiers of the garrison, men and women in civilian clothes, unimportant corpuses of the body of the little entity that was Port Ruthven. He noted, not without a faint disapproval, that too many of the guardsmen had neglected to change from fatigue to dress uniform, had not bothered to shave before enjoying their evening's liberty. He reflected wryly that the mythical Englishman who had insisted on dressing for dinner in the jungle was far more than a mere figure of fun.

He stiffened in his chair. "Frenchy!" he demanded urgently, gripping the other's arm, "who's that?"

Reluctantly LeClerc tore his eyes from the garishly lighted stage. He followed his friend's glance to the table where sat the tall brunette—black hair, white skin, a form-fitting black dress—and her companion.

"That is Natalya Orlanoff," he said. "The mayor's daughter."

"No. Not her. That . . . thing with her."

"That thing," replied the navigator, a faintly sardonic accent on the noun, "is Leporex, the Darshan trade commissioner. They have the usual set-up here. One of the natives lives inside the city as trade commissioner and—if the truth be known—as hostage."

"Oh," said Manson shortly.

"A pity," said LeClerc, his warm eyes straying back to the stage, "that one never sees the governor himself at such a place as this, anywhere, no? Some small association with the . . . how you say . . . facts of life would benefit any legislator."

To himself, "Pleasure-seeker," Manson said disgustedly.

He let LeClerc give the stage his undivided attention once more, and himself studied with undisguised interest the strangely assorted pair at the other table. He felt a little annoyed with the navi-

gator. Until now the girl, the mayor's daughter, had been no more than a blur of black and white, an out of focus picture beside the bizarre Darshan. Now he found it hard to concentrate upon the complexity of tendrils, the globular, furry body that was the native. He began to wonder why it was that he ever had been more than ordinarily interested—for he had seen in his travels many an alien life form. Perhaps it was the peculiar nature of the ornamentation affected by Leporex. He had known that such of the cargo as was intended for trading purposes consisted mainly of clocks and watches—but had assumed that those acquiring the timepieces would use them in the orthodox manner. He had not been led to believe that the Darshans were a race of primitive savages. One had only to look up to the Tower of Darkness to realize that they were not. Yet the native trade commissioner wore upon one tentacular arm no less than a dozen wrist watches.

They should have conveyed a strong impression of barbarity, or savagery. They didn't. Manson gave up wondering why this should be so and let himself look at Natalya Orlanoff.

This must be part of her duties as mayor's daughter, he told himself; to act as the hostess to little monstrosities that looked like something dredged up from outside the hundred fathom line. Although she was probably far safer with the Darshan than she would have been with a Terran escort—Anyhow—here was this unspeakable Leporex seeing the sights of Port Ruthven and monopolising the only good-looking girl in the place. And it wasn't even that the Darshan could appreciate it. It would be all one to him if his hostess had one eye and a wooden leg.

Manson poured himself another drink and, suddenly, felt very sorry for himself. The little part of his brain that was, on these occasions, a coldly disapproving but entirely powerless censor was telling him that he would be wise to lay off the local brew. He heard the warning, appreciated its timeliness—and poured himself another drink.

The band was playing something else now—a thing that was all strident brasses and insistent drums. The pilot shot a side-wise glance at LeClerc; the little navigator was still intent on the garishly lighted stage. He looked back to the mayor's daughter and the native trade commissioner. Their eyes met his. There was no hostility in the exchange of stares. There was curiosity; there was, from the girl, something that could have been an appeal

for help. And the brasses screamed and the drums were the hammers of creation. The music lit a rhythmic flame, faintly flickering, behind the white face of the girl. It was impossible for one not of his race to detect any emotion on the face of the Darshan. It was hard to believe, even, that the pupilless eyes were alive. Yet—and this was a matter of feeling rather than knowledge—it seemed to Manson that to the native the music was no more than a series, a combination of unpleasant atmospheric vibrations.

Manson's chair grated harshly on the floor as he rose to his feet. He stood there a second, swaying ever so slightly, a giant of a man still drawing his strength from the great Earth mother that was, to most of those present, but a dust mote circling a faint, far star, long ago and far away. There was a vitality, a solidity—all that ebbs slowly and almost imperceptibly from those too long absent from the planet of their birth. Some of the slovenly soldiers looked at him incuriously. Some of their companions looked at him with more interest—but this rapidly faded as they saw him walk, slowly and carefully, to the table of the mayor's daughter and the Darshan trade commissioner.

Then Manson was looking down at the tall, dark girl and her alien companion. Momentarily, he was tongue-tied. Had it not been for the hint of encouragement in the girl's dark eyes he would have retreated ignominiously. Then—

"Miss Orlanoff," he said. "I thought that I recognized you. Would you mind if I—"

"It would be a pleasure."

The girl extended a slim hand. Manson took it, held it a long second longer than was necessary.

"Leporex," said the mayor's daughter, "this is an old friend, a passenger on the *Argo*." Manson wondered if the native noticed the glance that flickered briefly over the insignia on his sleeves, and if the girl knew his true mission.

"Won't you introduce me, Manson?" came the voice of LeClerc. Manson started. He had not seen the little navigator leave the table. But his presence at this moment got him over an awkward hurdle. The girl was able to complete the little ceremony—the Darshan acknowledging in a thin, sibilant whisper that was a parody of Terran speech. Then there was a brief, awkward period. The spacemen knew that the girl wanted to tell them something. But there was some in-

hibition. It was obvious that what she wished to tell them, or ask of them, was not to be heard by the native.

Manson and LeClerc drew up chairs and sat down.

"Your first visit to Darsba?" asked the native of the chief pilot. His voice was high and thin, the merest ghost of a sound against the clamorous background of the music.

Manson started to reply. He hesitated. That little, invisible censor, coldly sober in the corner of his brain, told him to go carefully. Very carefully.

"No," he banced slowly. Then again, "no."

"Mr. Manson was here some years ago," said the girl. "He was a cadet on the *Draco*."

Manson smiled, his breath taken.

"Indeed?" The ghost of a voice was like a little, inquisitive wind. They could almost hear the rustle of the desiccated debris of dead years that it swept out from the forgotten corners of the mind. "Perhaps you can tell me what became of my friend Captain Clarendon."

"Captain Clarendon was never on the *Draco*," said LeClerc quickly.

"No?" There was a pause whilst the native's eyes, unrelieved pools of darkness, regarded the little navigator.

"Shall we all go round to the house?" asked the girl, a certain urgency in her voice. "This show is very boring. How do you find it, Leporex?"

"Incomprehensible."

The girl rose first. The trade commissioner was on his multiple feet a moment later. Manson looked around for the slovenly waiter so that he could pay the reckoning. But when it was brought the man ignored him, presented the slip of paper to the mayor's daughter. She initialed it with a little gold pencil. She half smiled—the first time that Manson had seen so much as the shadow of an emotion on her face.

"You have been the guests of the city of Port Ruthven," she said.

Manson mumbled his thanks. LeClerc said nothing—just bowed slightly from the waist. It was more effective than words could ever have been.

A waiter brought the girl's fur-lined wrap, helped her into it. The Darshan was unclothed: looking at him, Manson wondered if any clothing could be devised that would fit that body. The party threaded their way through the tables to the door. Outside, after the garish interior lightning, it was dark. A little wind sighed over the *Tamar ur Liran*, cold with

(he breath of interstellar space. Overhead sprawled the Great and Little Bears, subtly distorted, frostily scintillant. The warm light from the windows of the place they had just left, the faintly heard strains of strident music, seemed to call them back.

Manson shivered and turned up the wide collar of his uniform blouse.

The girl led them to the parking lot where her own vehicle stood among those of the many other patrons of the establishment. She opened the door. With unconscious arrogance Leporex got in first, taking the seat next to that of the driver. The two spacemen got in next, taking the rear seats. The girl was last. They heard the gyroscope whine as she started it, listened for the clicks as the parking props slid into their retracted position. On its single wheel the car slid out of the parking lot, turned sharp to follow the road along the river.

In the sharp beam of the headlight the trees along the river bank stood out in every detail. They were not too unearthly in appearance—their alienage lay in the angles made between twig and bough, bough and trunk. It was nothing that Manson could put his finger on. They were just trees. And they were *wrong*.

Now they were rolling up a broad, tree-lined avenue at right angles to the river road. Widely spaced, each in its own garden, stood the villas of the colonists. From big windows streamed bright lights, the symbols of the struggle of those inside to push back the dark. It seemed to the spacemen that over the whole town hung the spirit of a false, mirthless revelry. It was all part of some obscure struggle, a battle between man and some unknown, unknowable adversary. And man was losing.

The car ground to a stop.

It had halted outside a long, low building, the colonnaded frontage of which gave it a vaguely classical appearance. Its counterpart stood on thousands of worlds. Manson did not need to be told that this was the City Hall, the mayoral palace.

The parking props descended to the hard driveway with audible thuds. The note of the gyroscope descended the scale as its power was shut, as it spun to a long-delayed but inevitable standstill. The car door opened, letting in the cold night air.

Manson was out first. He stood by the open door ready to assist his hostess to

the ground. But the Darshan commissioner took the proffered arm as though by right. The touch of the tentacles on his sleeve, even through the thickness of the cloth, made the chief pilot want to cry out. It took more will power than he had known that he possessed to keep from flailing out wildly with that arm, to stop himself from dashing his fist into the featureless surface of eyes and appendages that served the Darshan for a face. Had he not known what must be the consequences of such an action he would have done so. But he swallowed—and remained motionless.

He saw LeClerc get down from the car. He saw his shipmate assist the mayor's daughter to the ground with a Latin grace that he could never hope to equal. And he felt what he could diagnose only as a stab of envy.

They—the two Earthmen and the native—followed the mayor's daughter into the palace. They followed her through rooms that must, once, have been fit for the entertainment of Galactic princes. Neglect now lay, an almost visible patina, over all these rooms. Almost visible—For there was nothing obvious, no untidiness, no dirt. It was psychic rather than physical. The heart had gone out of the place.

They found the mayor in a small room, half study, half lounge. The introduction, although made, was not necessary. Only a Slav could be the father of the Slavic girl who had brought them here. And Orlanoff was the last of a long line of poets and dreamers. He could have starved in an attic and plotted revolution under the Czars. He could have carried a rifle or manned a machine gun in the mad days when the old regime went down in flame and smoke, when the Red Dawn came up like thunder over the empire of the Romanoffs. He could have starved in an attic and plotted revolution under the Soviets—

The man with him, the big man in the untidy, stained uniform with the elaborate insignia on the epaulettes, must be the commandant of the fort. And, like his host, he was drunk. It was a hopeless sort of drunkenness. There was no merriment in it—none of the spirit of good fellowship that comes when two boon companions split a bottle or so together. It was not even drinking to forget. It was drinking because all else was futile.

"Father," said the girl.

The two men looked at the newcomers with dull, incurious eyes.

"Father," she said again, "I've brought Leporex back from the Golden Parrot. And guess who I met there—Bull Manson. Don't you remember him—he used to come to our dances when he was a cadet? And this is a shipmate of his, Mr. LeClerc—"

"Bull Manson," mumbled the mayor. "Yes, yes. Of course. And Mr. LeClerc. I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. LeClerc. But we will drink with our good friend Colonel Blucher here and ignore the fact that outside the night is cold—and that it will grow colder—"

With a hand that shook, with bottle neck chattering on tumbler rim, the colonel refilled his glass. He rose unsteadily to his feet. He declaimed in a thick voice:

"One Moment in Annihilation's Waste,
One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste—"

The stars are fading and the Caravan
Starts for the Dawn of Nothing—Oh,
make haste!"

Manson looked at the navigator. The other returned his glance. The little, dark clever face was serious, worried. They both looked at the girl. She was biting her lip. They saw a look of hopeless appeal in her eyes. Then she turned her head away quickly. It seemed that a strong aura of disapproval had emanated from the native—disapproval not for the sodden wrecks who were sprawling in the chairs, but for those who still retained some shreds of self-respect, on whose mental horizon still glowed the pale light that was hope for the future—for anything.

Colonel Blucher levered himself up from his chair. Clambered would almost be a better word. He clutched for support at the arms of the piece of furniture. He mumbled something in an indistinct voice.

"—of the Well of Life to taste—"
Manson thought he heard him say.

Then he cast adrift from his insecure moorings at the chair. He staggered across the room. Natalya drew back, but her way was blocked by Leporex. The colonel caught the girl with one arm around her waist, with his free hand he tried to raise her face for a kiss. She said nothing but struggled silently. In spite of his condition the soldier was a strong man. Slurped in his chair the mayor was a dumb, uninterested spectator.

With one stride Manson was across

the room. He seized the colonel by the collar of his uniform. With his left hand he caught the wrist of the arm that was around the girl's waist. He twisted—hard. And he flung the commandant from him as though he were some piece of carrion that would soil his hands. The heavy body thudded to the floor. It stirred feebly. Then the soldier raised himself to his hands and knees, his shaggy head shaking like that of some bewildered animal. He stood briefly erect, then collapsed into his chair. His unhurt arm reached out for the drink he had left on the low table.

Manson wanted to spit, to do anything to clear the vile taste of the room from his mouth. He wanted to demand of the mayor what sort of man he was to let his daughter be treated thus in his own house, by his own guest. But Orlanoff was asleep, or almost so.

"The cold—" they heard him whisper. "The cold— The cold and the dark— The end of all—"

Natalya said something too—something unheard by everyone but Bull Manson. Two syllables, barely breathed, but they said that she admired him, and trusted him, and knew that she had been right in introducing him into this fantasy as she had. She said, "Thank you."

The dark—*Tamar*, in the language of this world wearily circling its faint, dim sun. *Tamar—Tamar ur Cholon—the Tower of Darkness*. Orlanoff whispering in their minds took on substance, was clothed with insubstantial ghosts of words.

"*Tamar ur Cholon*," Laporex was saying. "Tonight you come to the Tower of Darkness—"

"Tonight—" Natalya's voice was a whisper almost as tenuous as that of the native. "Yes, tonight. But my friends—"

There was a hesitation that told of the weighing of unknown factors in the Darshan's mind. Then—

"They may come."

"We shall be charmed," said LeClerc, with an irony that was wasted on Laporex. And—

"What goes on?" demanded Bull Manson.

The alcohol-induced hellierence was fast fading. He knew that the girl wanted them to come, was expecting them—*him*—to deliver her from some unknown danger. And he was not sure that he wanted to go. He was remembering the navigator's unpleasant little story about

the shipmate who had lost interest in everything—even living.

"What goes on?" he said again.

The mayor's daughter swung to face him, the black of her dress momentarily molding the long, firm curve of her thighs. Yet there was no vitality in her, and there was the sense, subtle, hard to define, of something missing. But she swung to face him, and although her white face was expressionless, the black eyes were eloquent.

"I do not know," she whispered. "My father became interested in the Tower of Darkness. He was taken there by Laporex. The colonel has visited the Tower of Darkness. And many citizens have been gone. You will ask why with this before us as a warning." There was nothing but contempt in the gesture with which she indicated the sprawling mayor, "we should go. But we must. It stands there—tall, compelling. Both by day and night it hulks big on our narrow horizon. Can't you see? It is the urge to know—"

"It is Truth." The voice of the native was a barely audible whisper, heard in the mind rather than with the ears. "It is Truth—and the answering of all questions."

One of the many smooth tentacles came up to slide, with a revoltingly caressive motion, over the little, shining watches strapped to the armlike appendage. Manson knew suddenly that they were not worn as ornamentation, that in them was a religious symbolism beyond his comprehension.

"Cold and dark—" muttered the mayor. "No light . . . nowhere any light any more . . . and the darkness everlasting—"

Somehow they found themselves outside the door. From the room they had left came the unsteady chattering of bottle neck on tumbler rim, the sound of two, dreary voices raised in dreary song. Manson and LeClerc fell in, one on either side of the girl, a bodyguard. The trade commissioner, not looking hack, led them out of the palace. Manson was glad that the native was not looking hack, had not looked hack. For he had taken the opportunity to slip the colonel's heavy service blaster from its holster, and it was making an unsightly, obvious bulge in his trousers pocket.

They all got into the mono-wheeled car—Laporex first and then the mayor's daughter and her escort. As before, she

took the driver's seat, and as before the native sat beside her. In silence they skimmed down the broad avenue to the river road. The lights were still harshly bright over the highway, from the houses they passed. There was traffic now—townspeople returning from the various places of entertainment. There was drunkenness at the wheel, weaving headlights and protesting, mishandled machines bearing their fallible masters into dangers and hair-breadth escapes that they themselves, given independent volition, would have avoided. It was, in short, an exhibition that would not have been tolerated on any other colonized planet of that Galaxy.

But the girl appeared not to notice. With ~~easy~~ skill she pulled away from seemingly inevitable collisions, from every hazard of the dark, monster ridden road. She sent her car whining along the river bank, past the Golden Parrot and similar establishments from which still streamed garish light, from which still drifted the rhythmic beat of meretricious melody. Then hard left she swung, over a bridge that flung its frail, slender arch across the River of Darkness. There were guards at the bridge, and a gate. But the gate was open and the soldiers snapped briefly to attention as the car went by.

From behind them came the glow of the city lights, but ahead the sky was dark. Black against the faint, northern constellations, a deeper, sharply etched black against the dimly luminous blackness of the night sky, loomed the Tower of Darkness. And as the miles unrolled under the single, whirling wheel of the car the monstrous monolith reached up into the sky, reached out and up for the far, faint stars, the lights that were an affront to its own negation of all light.

And Manson was afraid. It wasn't a physical fear—he was a strong man and armed, and he was not called "Bull" for nothing. But he was afraid as his mind groped vaguely with his first dim concepts of the grim symbolism rearing its dreadful height before him. And he heard LeClerc saying something softly, in an awed voice—and yet with that faint touch of ironical amusement that never left him.

"Alike for those who for Today prepare,
And those that after a Tomorrow stare,
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness
cries
'Fools! Your reward is neither Here nor
There!'"

And the white ribbon of the road stretched before them, brilliant in the beam of the headlights, rolling back swiftly and smoothly under the wheel of the car. And the Tower of Darkness loomed ever more huge and frightening, higher and higher, until all the world ahead, save for the last, short shred of the roadway, was black.

The car slowed, rolled to a halt under an enormous arch. The parking props clicked to the ground. The gyroscope, shut off, spun slower and slower, its whine deepening and dying, running down, running down—All around them were the people of Leporex, unseen, sibilant voices in the darkness. Tentacles reached into the car. Manson struggled to draw his gun, but his arms were pinioned. He was lifted from his seat, set down, standing, on to something hard and solid. He could feel the girl against him, firm yet soft, warm. His frightened mind caught hold of that warmth, clung to it and the sound of her regular, unhurried breathing. On his other side was LeClerc. He could not see the navigator, but he knew that he was smiling. He knew that even this could not shake the other's outlook, that inimitable compound of kindness and cynicism, youthful eagerness and weary experience.

Surrounded by soft, cold bodies, unable to stir a finger, the mavor's daughter and the two spacemen were half led, half carried, across the cold, hard floor. And there was a confused period—short or long they had no means of knowing—when they felt themselves borne steadily upwards. It was not that they felt the floor pressing against their feet—it was that, for frightened seconds or minutes, there was no floor. No floor—and the nightmare sense of flight.

Then they were standing once more, standing on a smooth, cold surface. A cold surface. The chill struck upwards through the soles of their shoes, crept up through feet, and legs, and body. The air about them was still and cold, dead—yet alive with the eerie, half-heard whisperings of the beings all around them.

Slowly, hesitantly, light dawned. No more than a dim, green pallor it was, ally rather than enemy of the darkness, and cold. The waves of cold beat all around them, through them. The cold and the dark, the last, implacable enemies. The last realities. The only

realities. The beginning and the end of all.

Before them, limned in pale-green fire, loomed the Machine. Homely it was, familiar, no more than a magnified projection of a commonplace piece of mechanism. Alien it was to the natives of this world—and yet of all man's vast stock of manufactured goods it was that most in demand for harter. For it was the symbol of their dark worship, of their hungry, implacable god, of their faith that was the negation of all faith.

In their ears, amplified until it was the pulse of ultimate doom, beat the noise of the Machine. And between each stroke and its successor the interval was longer, longer, until the dreadful, irrational fear that every stroke would be the last drove all else from the shrinking human minds. And on the heels of the fear came resignation, realization—the full, shocking impact of the joyless philosophy of the natives.

Beat by beat, through gear trains, by the friction of almost frictionless hearings, the last remaining ergs of energy in the mainspring were being dissipated. Throughout the Universe suns without number squandered their energy, their very substance, in short, futile flarings of light and heat. Short, futile flarings not as measured against the pitifully brief duration of intelligent life—but as seen against the background of the ever encroaching dark, the eternal night. The clock was running down.

All this, and more, flashed through Manson's mind. Like all men he had accepted without question the validity of the second law of thermodynamics. Accepted it—but with the intellect only. Now it was an emotional acceptance—and the acceptance brought despair.

The clock was running down.

And the gelid air was alive, was pulsing with thought. There were the thoughts of the natives, organized, heating down the opposition put up by the three from Earth. *Accept*, they cried wordlessly, *accept—and put an end to your endless striving for you know not what. Ours is the way, the only way—the way to oneness with that which is greater than all the stars. Ours is the way of peace, of acceptance, of resignation. Ours is the way of peace—*

Soundlessly, wordlessly, came the thoughts of the mayor's daughter. They were pictures, they were a song. They were the dawn and the sunset, they were Reveille and Retreat, they were the sunset gun.

The sunset gun—

The sunset gun, and the flag, dark against the dark sky, creeping down its halyards, and the swift strides of the dark, the night, the cold and the dark, nevermore any light anywhere, and darkness for evermore and evermore.

Something exploded in Manson's brain. It was an oath, it was a shout of protest and defiance. It was a hand, warm and friendly, thrust out into the darkness to grasp those of his comrades. It was a ladder by which the girl could climb from the abyss into which her treacherous thoughts had led her.

It was the roar of machines, and the hoarse song of those who built the machines, tended the machines. It was cities, thrusting, many pinnacled, through the low clouds. It was man the artisan, man the builder.

And it was the gleaming armadas of interstellar conquest, the pomp and pageantry of galactic empires. It was investing fleets, raining fire and destruction upon rebellious worlds; it was great battleships fighting on against odds with but one gun left to fire—and one man left to fire that gun. It was man the fighter. It was man reaching out to the stars.

It was the flare of rocket drive against the stars, against the stars, against the cold darkness between the stars, the cold darkness, the cold, the cold and—

It was the roar of machines, the song of power, the music of moving parts interacting, the song of steel, of swift moving steel. But discordance crept into the song, there was wear, erosion, the wearing out of the Machine, the running down of the clock, the cold and the darkness, the night, and darkness for evermore and ever—

And so it was that Bull Manson—great, hearty, brilliant Bull Manson—failed.

He had voiced his defiance with an oath. The clock was running down, and with his ringing oath he had said, "And when it does—we'll wind it up again!"

It was magnificent. It was not enough. It failed. Custer was magnificent, too, to those who read the ancient legends.

The cold pressed close. Radiant energy is the source of life, but radiant energy is only the symptom of imbalance. Collapsing matter must radiate, and then the time must come when all excess matter-energy is dispersed and redistributed; and then the stars will grow cold. Forces must balance. Forces—will balance. In the Tower of Darkness, in the slowing heat of the Machine, the ultimate darkness was palpable. Cold was there, emanating from

the destructive fervor of the solemn natives. Darshan civilization had declined and died, and in the rightness of its dying, it was carrying humanity.

A little moan escaped Natalya's soft lips, and she leaned against the man nearest her, faint, sick, and not caring.

The man was LeClerc. As she touched him, as her weight came to him, his glossy head turned to her. She was woman; and with all his unthinking grace, he slipped his arms around her. It was dark, and it was cold, but—

But that could wait, LeClerc kissed her.

Full in the eyes of the Darshan priests, they kissed. So perfectly timed was that kiss, its emanations so completely disruptive, that the strange, dark figures recoiled. And now there was music—crashing cymbals, strident brass, and the living pulse-beat of the drums. There was light—harsh, garish, flickering in time with the music, stronger and stronger, brighter and brighter, fighting back the cold and the darkness.

The Tower of Darkness was a looming shadow on the road behind them. Black it stood against the morning sky, ominous, forbidding. But their backs were turned to it.

The girl was driving. Beside her sat LeClerc. They were very close. Alone in the rear seat was Manson. He sensed what the finish of the story would be for the navigator and the mayor's daughter, but he was only a little jealous. He knew that his friend had saved them all from a philosophy of dark despair too much for the human mind to bear, and he was grateful. And curious.

LeClerc, his arm still over Natalya's shoulders, turned to look into the back seat.

"So," he said. "So our Mr. Leporex has promised not to play at missionaries any more. So he thinks we aren't suitable to receive the great truth of Tamar." His face grew serious. "If I had a god, my friend, I would pray that we never are."

Bull Manson laughed. "Promised? Leporex promised?" Another deep peal of laughter escaped him. "We . . . you horrified him, LeClerc. We are unfit. You hear, you hedonistic devil? We're unfit!"

"Unfit, then," smiled the Frenchman. "And therefore you, my friend, will doubtless recommend in your report that the administration here be replaced by personnel who have shown that they take the . . . ah . . . better things of life for their intrinsic value, and not as a means of forgetting the encroachment of the shadows. No?" He chuckled. "Hedonists—who will properly take good care of Darshan exports in-between times."

Bull Manson looked at the little navigator's dark silhouette with an ever-growing respect, thinking of the difference between Natalya's two kisses—the colonel's, and LeClerc's; wondering—

"Tell me," he said. "How did you know?"

"I did not know," replied the other, decisively. "I felt. I felt what I have always felt; and feeling so—why, the tastes and colors of *now* are of greater importance than the end of time or death or the course of life. You call that Hedonism, no? My friend, there is more truth, more reality, in the thighs of a dancing girl than in all the philosophies of this, or any, other world."

Then—

"Do you think, Bull, that you could drive this car?"



TROUBLE

By GEORGE O. SMITH

*"It takes two to make a quarrel"
doesn't mean two different people,
really—just two different viewpoints!*

TOM LIONEL, Consulting Engineer, awoke with a shake of his head. At once, he was out of bed. He consulted first the calendar and then the clock. The thought struck him funny. He hadn't been drinking, but the idea of looking at a calendar upon awakening might be construed as an admission that he didn't know what time of what day it was.

Or mayhap what month.

"Ding it," he grunted. "I've been away again."

He dressed by stages. At the trousers department, Tom wandered out into the living room and stood over a chessboard, studying the set-up. The opponent had moved the queen to the rook's fourth, menacing his bishop. Tom smiled and moved his knight to his knight's sixth and checked the opponent's king on the rook's first, and the queen simultaneously. He slid the drawer below the table open and removed a little standing sign that said, in red, block letters:

CHECK!

"Let him try that one, will he?" laughed Tom. The move was basic; in checking the king and menacing the queen simultaneously, Tom had—or would upon the next move—collect himself his opponent's queen with no great loss.

At the shirt and necktie stage, Tom Lionel stood teetering on his heels before the bookcase on the right of the fireplace. He took from the case a slim volume and read the title with considerable distaste:

"Theory of Monomolecular Films
in Fission-Reaction"

By

A. G. Rodan, Ph.D., M.M., LL.D.

"Yipe!" exploded Tom as he opened the book and glanced at the price: \$9.50. With ease he prorated the price against the thickness of the volume and came to the estimate that the book had cost approximately nineteen dollars per inch excluding covers. He riffled through the pages and paused here and there to

read, but the pages themselves were a good average of four lines of text to the rest of the page full of nuclear equations.

Tom Lionel snorted. He ran down through one of the arguments and followed it to conclusion.

"Why can't he get something worth reading?" he yawned, putting the book back in its place. "Darned impractical stuff." As usual with a man who spends much time in his own company, Tom Lionel talked aloud to himself—and occasionally was known to answer himself back. "The whole trouble with the entire tribe of physicists per se is the fact that once, someone told one of them that he was a theorist, an idealist, and a dealer in the abstract. Now the bunch of them are afraid to do anything practical because they're afraid if they do, people won't know they're physicists. Physicists are a sort of necessary, end-product evil."

During the breakfast section of Tom's morning duties, Tom read the latest copy of the "Proceedings of the I.R.E." with some relish. A paper on the "Crystallographic Generation of Microwaves" complete with plainly manipulated differential calculus and engineering data occupied most of his time. The rest of the time through coffee he was making marks on the tablecloth with the egg-laden end of his fork and trying to fit the crystallographic generation of microwaves into a problem that made the article most timely: the solution for which he had been seeking for a week.

The mail arrived. Three household bills were filed in the desk to await the first of the month. Two advertisements were filed into the wastebasket. One thick letter addressed to Thomas Lionel, Ph.D., M.M., was taken carefully between thumb and forefinger and deposited in a letter file.

Tom then inspected the other letter file and found two letters addressed to Tom Lionel, Consulting Engineer, which he opened and read. One was from a concern in Cedar Rapids that wanted some information on a method of in-

duction heating glued joints selectively without waiting for the normal drying time. The other was a letter from a medium-sized town in Illinois pertaining to some difficulty they were having with police-radio coverage of that area.

Both letters meant money, and Tom Lionel set the first aside while he started to work on the second. From the engineering data supplied by the local engineer, Tom decided that a change in antenna height and a conversion from quarter-wave current fed to a one and one quarter-wave current fed antenna would give the desired coverage. He concluded his letter with four pages of calc, seven diagrams, and as a last measure dropped a photograph of a similar installation in the envelope.

He gloated. That would net him a pretty penny. The guy who hung that antenna on top of the water tank thought he was smart, getting all that height. But the roof was metal, and therefore the radiation angle took off from the rooftop as a basis rather than the true ground a hundred feet below.

The tank top was greater than three wave lengths in diameter, and conical to boot. Tom grinned at the maze of mathematics that solved it—and as far as he was concerned it was solved, for Tom Lionel was a top-flight engineer.

He checked on his calendar. Metal for the sonic job was not due for a week yet; a minute casting was still being held up for the foundry's pleasure; and the life-test of the bearing-jewel for the Watson Instrument Corporation was still on. Good jewel that. No sign of freeze-up or wear-out after twenty-seven million cycles.

"Theory of Monomolecular Films be hanged," he snorted. "He's the kind of a guy that would try to analyze the brew that MacBeth's three witches were cooking up. And don't ask why!"

What he objected to most was the other's unconcern at spending money. Nine bucks and fifty cents for a book of the most questionable theory—and nine fifty that the other didn't really earn. It was getting worse. The other was really beginning to obtrude. He hadn't minded, particularly, except for the mental anguish. He'd become reconciled to it by sheer rationalization. Way, way down deep in his heart he knew that he'd have enjoyed being a physicist himself. But physicists were not particularly practical, and money was made with practical things. He knew, and recognized, that his retreat from being a physicist him-

self had given him a dislike for the breed, especially when he knew that solution of a problem was theirs, but reduction to practice was his. He was continuously being forced to take some physicist's wild-haired scheme and making it cook meat, open cans, or dig post holes. The physicist had all the fun of standing on the threshold and delving into phenomena that abounded just over the line. And then instead of working on the suggestion that the physicist had located in the wilderness, the physicist just tossed it over his shoulder into Lionel's lap and went on digging.

Obviously it must be fun to dig in the unknown, but why in the name of sense—

"Theory of Monomolecular Films in Fission-Reaction," scowled Tom Lionel. "A hypothesis on a theory for an idea, based upon a practical impossibility, and directed at a problem solvable only by concentrated masses. He should be working in a negative universe where non-matter repels nonmatter disproportionately to the nonmass and inversely disproportional to the not-square of the not-distance between. Holy Entropy."

Tom Lionel went out of the house, mentally tinkering with the glue-joint heating problem. That shouldn't be hard, he thought, high-frequency heating was no trick, though the furniture company probably had no one in the place that knew what high frequency really meant.

He'd take a chair, rip it apart at the joints, and start tinkering with the big radio-frequency heater in the lab. Another fat consulting fee—eminently practical and satisfying—from the simple engineering of a means to accelerate the drying of glue by electronics.

Eminently practi—hell!

Lionel stared. The door closed slowly behind him as he walked ever so slowly across the floor of the lab. There was his radio-frequency heater, all right. But it was not in its usual place. It was across the room nuzzling up against another piece of equipment—the latter new, shining, and absolutely alien to the lab.

Tom went over to the set-up and inspected it with critical derision.

The alien piece of equipment had been a standard model of mass spectrograph. Its sleek sides were gaping open, and the high-frequency heater was permanently wired—piped—into the very heart of the spectrograph. Peering into the maze of one-inch copper tubing that led from the output of the high-frequency heater to

the insides of the spectrograph, Lionel saw at once what the reason was.

The spectrograph had been overhauled by the physicist. It now contained a pair of "D" chambers.

Operating on the cyclotron principle, the spectrograph was using the output of the high-frequency heater to energize the D chambers. Lionel nodded. The frequency was about right; could be adjusted to the proper value without any trouble at all. He felt an infinitesimally short twitch of admiration for the idea before he started to roar in anguish.

His first impulse was to rip the gadget apart so that he could go to work on something practical. But the engineer's admiration for the idea stopped him.

But this was getting thick.

It had been getting thicker for a long time. It was getting intolerable. He didn't mind too much having volumes of utterly cock-eyed theory about the place, but when the physicist starts to appropriate equipment for his screwball ideas, it was time to call a halt.

Lionel left the laboratory, returned to his house, and called a psychiatrist.

An hour later he was in Dr. Hamilton's office.

"Why are you here?" asked Hamilton pleasantly.

"I want to get rid of a physicist."

"Tell him to go away."

"Can't. Impossible."

"Nothing is impossible."

"Look, doctor, have you ever tried to light a safety match on a wet bar of soap?"

"Suppose you tell me about it, then."

Tom Lionel was more than talkative for a half hour.

"A clear-cut case of split-personality. A most remarkable cleavage."

Lionel muttered something.

"What did you say?"

"I'd rather not repeat it," said Tom.

"Please—it may have a bearing on your case."

"I was merely thinking of an hypothetical case. Says the doctor to his associate: 'Doctor, look at this magnificent tumor,' and his buddy answers: 'Lovely, but you should see my case of angina; it's positively beautiful.'"

"Oh?"

"So I'm a most remarkable case, huh?"

"You are. There seems to be a deep-seated liking for one another that has been barred psychologically by certain factors in your youth. You play chess. You respect one another's property—"

"That's what you say. The other bird just screwed up my dielectric heater to fiddle up a cyclotron spectrograph."

"Might try putting it to work," observed Hamilton.

"Oh, I will. After all, he can't get ahead of me."

"Then why the outcry?"

"Because who knows what he'll do next."

"He's appropriated things before?"

"Only to the extent of buying books?"

"What manner of books?"

"The last one he purchased was entitled 'The Theory of Monomolecular Films in Fission-Reaction.'"

"Mind explaining that? It sounds like Greek to me."

Lionel smiled tolerantly. "If you have a flat table and a pile of kid's toy blocks, you can either build a structure or lay 'em on the table in a single layer. Since molecules are often called the building-blocks of the universe, the analogy is quite clear. The blocks in a single layer form a monomolecular layer. Fission reaction is a self-sustaining nuclear reaction."

"Sounds quite erudite."

"In the first place, no one with any sense would try to make use of it. It is the type of volume that a physicist would write in the hope that he will get letters pro and con on the subject which will be useful in forming a later theory."

"Then it is not a complete waste of time."

"Any time I lay out nine bucks for a half-inch of paper—"

"Expensive, isn't it?" asked the doctor.

"Sure. Those things are not best sellers, usually. The publisher puts it out in the name of science and must at least get his printing cost out of the very limited edition."

"I see. And you want to get rid of this physicist?"

"Who wouldn't. After all, I had this body first. He's an interloper."

"Seems that way."

"It is—and it's annoying."

"We may be able to do something about it," said the psychiatrist. "Permit me to think about this for a few days. We'll have another consultation in a week. We may require another one before I make a decision. But it seems to me that you are both intelligent, useful citizens. Neither of you is irresponsible or dangerous. You have enough money to afford schizophrenia for a while. Especially if the personality B dreams up things that personality A make practical."

financially advantageous use of. Ergo you need fear nothing for a few weeks."

"Ugh. Means I'll have to go out and buy another high-frequency heater. O.K., doctor, I'll lay low."

Thomas Lionel, Ph.D., M.M., awoke with a shake of his head. At once, he was out of bed. He consulted first the calendar and then the clock. The thought struck him funny. He hadn't been drinking, but the idea of looking at a calendar upon awakening might be construed as an admission that he didn't know what time of what day it was.

Or mayhap what month.

"I've been away again," he grunted.

He dressed by stages. At the trousers department, Thomas wandered out into the living room and stood over the chessboard, studying the set-up.

He removed the little sign that said:

CHECK 1

and dropped it into the drawer again. He moved his king aside with a contemplative smile. His queen was gone on the next move, he knew. So he had lost a major piece. So that other bird thought that losing a major piece was bad, huh? Well, winning battles does not count—it is a matter of who wins the last one.

He found the volume on the theory of monomolecular films and started to read with relish. Over coffee, at breakfast, Thomas made notations on the margin of the book with a pencil; checked some of the equations and though he found them balanced properly, the author was amiss in not considering the lattice-effect in his presumptions. No monomolecular film could follow that type of reaction simply because—well, it could follow it, but since the thing was to take place in a monomolecular film, the fission-reaction and the radiation by-products that cause the self-sustaining nature could only be effective in a plane of molecular thickness. That meant a .999999% loss, since the radiation went off spherically. Fission-reaction might take place, but it would be most ineffective. Besides, the equations should have taken that into account.

He stopped by the desk and wrote for a half hour, filling seventeen pages full of text and mathematics, explaining the error in the author's presumption.

He sealed it up and mailed it with some relish. No doubt that letter would start a fight.

He found his letter in the letter file and read it. It was a request to indulge in some basic research at a fancy figure, but Thomas was not particularly interested. He was thinking of another particular line of endeavor. He dropped the letter into the wastebasket.

He went into the lab and took a look at his cyclotronic spectrograph. There was a letter hung on the front. Thomas opened it and read:

Dear Isaac Newton:

I don't particularly mind your laying out thirty-five hundred bucks for a mass spectrograph.

Appropriating my high-frequency generator didn't bother me too much.

Nor did your unsymmetrical wiring and haywire peregrinations in and about the two of them annoy (too acutely) my sense of mechanical and electrical precision.

But the idea of your using the spectrograph only once—just for prechange calibration—makes me madder than mad!

Sincerely,

Tom Lionel,
Consulting Engineer.

Thomas grinned boyishly and picked up the notebook on top of the high-frequency heater. It was Tom's, and the physicist rifled through it to the last-used pages. He found considerable in the way of notes and sketches on the cyclotron spectrograph. Cut in size by about one quarter, the thing would be not only a research instrument of value, but would be of a price low enough to make it available to schools, small laboratories, and perhaps production-lines—if Tom Lionel could find a use for a mass spectrograph on a production line.

Thomas grinned again. If it were possible, Tom would certainly have it included on *some* production line, somewhere.

He looked the spectrograph over and decided that it was a fine piece of apparatus. So it wasn't the shining piece of commercial panel and gleaming meters. The high-frequency plumbing in it had the touch of a one-thumbed plumber's apprentice after ten days' drinking and the D plates were soldered together with a heavy hand. But it did work—and that's all he cared. The knobs and dials he had added were sticking out at all angles, but they functioned.

And the line-voltage ripple present in the high-frequency generator made a particular mess out of the spectrograph separation. But electronic heaters do not

normally come luxuriously equipped with rectifiers and filters so that the generator tubes were served with pure direct current—the circuit was self-rectified which would give a raucous signal if used as a radio transmitter. That generated a ripple-varied signal for the D plates and it screwed up the dispersion. The omission of refinement satisfied Thomas. So it wasn't perfect. It would be by the time Tom Lionel got through with it.

And for the time being, Thomas would leave it alone. No use trying to make it work until Tom made an engineering model out of the physicist's experiment.

Smiling to himself, Thomas went to work in the laboratory. He ignored Tom's experiments and started a few of his own accord.

Some hours later, the doorbell rang and Thomas went to the door to find a letter, addressed to Thomas Lionel, Ph.D. It was from an Arthur Hamilton, M.D.

"Hm-m-m," said Thomas. "Is there something the matter with me?" He slit the envelope and removed a bill for consultation.

"Consultation? Consultation? What in the name of all that's unholy is he consulting a doctor about? Or is the doctor consulting—no, the bill is rendered in the wrong direction. I know my consulting engineer."

The physicist put on his hat and headed forth. It was not much later that he was sitting again in the same chair, facing Hamilton.

"You're back."

"Nope," smiled Thomas. "I'm here, not back."

"But you were here last week."

"That was another fellow. Look, Hamilton, I think I require your assistance. I have an engineer that is no end of bother."

"Want to get rid of him, huh?" answered Hamilton. The suppressed smile fought valiantly and won, and the doctor's face beamed and then he broke into laughter. "What am I, anyway? Man, I can't take money from both sides. That's . . . that's . . . barratry, or something."

"I'm the same man."

"Nope. You are not."

"Well, by and large, I thought it might be of interest to you to hear both sides. It might be that I am a useful citizen in spite of what the engineer says."

"The engineer's opinion is that no physicist is worth an unprintable."

"The physicist's opinion is that all engineers are frustrated physicists."

"Might challenge him to a fight."

"Have. But chess isn't too satisfying. I want blood."

"It's your blood."

"That's the annoying part of it all. He seems entirely a different fellow."

"The cleavage is perfect. You would think him a separate entity." Hamilton paused, "But neither of you refer to the other by name. That indicates a psychological block that may be important evidence."

"O.K., what do we do?"

"I must discover the reason for the split personality."

"I can give you that reason. The engineer was forced into being a practical man because money lies in that direction. Upon getting out of college, there was a heavy debt. It was paid off by hard work—a habit formed and never broken. Bad habits, you know, are hard to break."

"Interesting."

"Well, the desire to delve into the physicist's realm stayed with the engineer, but people who had heavy purses were not interested in new ways to measure the ether-drift or the effect of cosmic radiation on the physical properties of carbon. Money wants more perfect pencil sharpeners, ways of automatically shelling peas, and efficient methods of de-gassing oil. All these things are merely applications in practice of phenomena that some physicist has uncovered and revealed and put on record so that some engineer can use the effect to serve his ends."

"At any rate, the desire to be a physicist is strong, strong enough to cause schizophrenia. I, Dr. Hamilton am a living, breathing, talking example that an engineer is but a frustrated physicist. He is the troubled one—I am the stable personality. I am happy, well-adjusted, and healthy."

"I see. Yet he has his point. You, like other physicists, are not interested in making money. How, then, do you propose to live?"

"A physicist—or an engineer—can always make out well. The bank account at the last sitting was something like ninety-four thousand, six hundred seven-teen dollars and thirty-four cents."

"That's quite a lot of money."

"The engineer considers it a business backlog," said Thomas. "Equipment is costly. Ergo—see?"

"I see. Seems you laid out a large sum of money for a mass spectrograph."

"I did."

"And what did he do?"

"He made notes on it and is going to peddle it as a commercial product. He'll probably make fifty thousand dollars out of it."

"I suggested that," admitted the psychiatrist.

"That's all right. I don't mind. It sort of tickles me, basically. I do things constantly that make him roar with anguish. And then his only rebuttal is to take it and make something practical out of it."

"I see."

"That, you understand, is the game that has been going on for some time between all physicists and engineers."

"If you'd leave one another alone, you'd all be better off," said Hamilton. "From what I've heard, the trouble lies in the fact that physicists are not too interested in the practical details, whilst the engineer resents the physicist's insistence upon getting that last point zero two percent of performance."

"Are you willing to give me my answer?"

"What answer?"

"How do I get rid of the engineer? One of us has got to go, and being the stable, happy one, I feel that all in all I am the best adjusted and therefore the most likely to succeed. After all, I am the ideal personality according to the other one. He'd like to be me. That's why he is, from time to time."

"Sort of a figment of your own imagination."

"That's me."

"Then I wonder— Yet, I did accept his case, not yours."

"Whose case?"

"Um . . . ah . . . I— Look, if you frustrate him to the extreme, he'll retreat into you more and more until he does not appear. Follow?"

"I get it. O.K., doctor. He'll be the most frustrated engineer in the world. And I am just the guy to do it."

Tom Lionel, Consulting Engineer, looked foolishly at the claw hammer in one hand and wondered about it. About him in the laboratory were stacks of huge packing cases.

Unpacked already were several monstrous bits of equipment. Lionel shook his head. Where had this mess come from? He hadn't ordered it—

Or,

Had he?

Lionel left the laboratory on the dead run. He tripped once and fell flat on his

face and as he started up again, the top of his head came with a sharp bang against the unyielding bottom of a ruling engine.

"A grating engine," yelled Tom.

On the desk, in plain sight, was a pile of bills-of-lading. Tom riffled through them, consulted packing lists, and a catalog of ordered equipment. In his own handwriting, too.

Grand total outlay \$94,617.34; balance to be paid within thirty days: \$16,750.00.

"Not only broke," grunted Tom, "but bleeding too."

His handwriting was his handwriting. Not a chance in the world of refuting the order, or packing the stuff up and sending it back. He was stuck with it.

But the conglomeration that Thomas had picked out. A sort of aggregation of large and small parts that would have made a small college laboratory figuratively drool at the thought; but which would only grow dust, rust, and corrosion in any manufacturing plant.

With the possible exception, of course, of a manufacturer of scientific equipment for colleges and laboratories.

What production line could make use of a ruling engine?

And if one could, could it use a micro-densitometer in the same process?

Of course, the micro-vacuum pump could be used in a vacuum tube manufacture, in a pinch. Vacuum tube companies normally used large-volume pumps instead of the little super-efficient exhaustion pump that could take a few cubic centimeters down to a few millimicrons of mercury.

The electron microscope was a nice hunk of stuff, but the thing was not applicable to anything except research.

And the instantaneous X-ray gadget was tricky as the devil—and adapted mostly to the job of taking pictures of bullets under fire as they passed up through the rifling of a gun.

One pile of stuff was directed—according to Tom's designation—only at the problem of investigating the Earth's gravitational field as for strength, direction, and conflicting urges.

A transit. Now what in the name of sin would a radio engineer want with a transit? Nice piece of stuff, and far superior to the little dumpy-level that Tom used to lay out antenna arrays and directive antennas of one sort or another. But, a transit!

And so the list went on, \$111,367.34 worth of the most interesting, best made,

neatly assembled hunks of utterly impractical scientific machinery ever collected under one roof.

A solid vista of impracticality as far as the eye could reach.

The ton of bricks that broke the camel's back.

Tom roared through the house, took a look at the chessboard and with a savage movement, took the physicist's queen with his knight. He'd get even with that physicist if it took—

Well, almost anything.

Fifteen minutes later he was in Dr. Hamilton's office, pounding on the desk.

"Look," he roared, "that physicist just clipped me for my entire bankroll and then dropped me into debt by sixteen grand. I want him clipped!"

"Now take it easy," said the doctor. "Remember you are talking about yourself."

"Doc, if I commit suicide am I liable for murder?"

"Yup. Going to try?"

"Nope. Life is too interesting. My main regret with life is that I was born a hundred years too soon. My only compensation is that I may live to be a hundred, so that I can see what I've missed by being born too soon. Follow?"

"You sound mentally healthy enough."

"Thanks. But what about him? You've seen him."

"I have. He came to me about you."

"And what are you doing about it . . . us?"

Dr. Hamilton laughed. "Mind if I speak bluntly?"

"Not at all. I can take it."

"Then consider. Both you and your . . . physicist . . . are sensible, useful citizens. Both of you can contribute much to civilization. Both of you can and will be respectable people, for which other people will have admiration."

"I am in the middle," said the doctor. "I can be no more than a referee. I see both sides. I believe the cleavage came as a result of frustration on your part—you know the details—and as such, you become him when you are frustrated. The reason why he becomes you is also clear. Whenever he finds himself in straits due to the necessity of practical thought, the slip-over occurs. You awoke with a stripping hammer in your hand, unpacking scientific equipment that the physicist bought. He, obviously, became quite worried about the financial situation

upon viewing the stuff he bought and could face it no more."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Now consider again. Neither of you is dangerous. You are both interesting and valuable to society. The only thing that is at all bothersome is the fact that you, per se, are not happy. You need an integration of personality. He needs the same. I might hope for a coalescing of you two, but at the moment—and possibly for all time—it is impossible. All I can tell you is the same thing that I told him. Frustration to the extreme will exorcise the other personality. He tried it by running you into debt; by purchasing a laboratory full of things that you, as an engineer, can see no practical use for. You frustrated him—or tried to—by making something commercial out of his last experiment. That, unfortunately, was not frustration for him.

"You must—if you wish to freeze him out—develop something that will frustrate the physicist and still be possible to rationalize in your own personality."

"Um."

"An insolvable problem would do it—if you can shun the problem yourself."

"That might be difficult."

"Especially when the two of you are inclined to become the other when faced with a problem that does not fit in your psyche."

"The problem—I wonder."

"What do you do when you are faced with a tough or impossible problem in physics?"

"I don't get 'em, usually."

"Well, supposing some company required a casting of tungsten metal, for instance."

"I'd ask that they show me exactly why the tungsten couldn't be found in another manner."

"Supposing they demanded that it be cast?"

"There isn't anything on God's green earth that could be used to handle molten tungsten. Tungsten metal can be shaped, forged, machined, or cold-rolled. But you can't cast it. Ergo, if I were offered that problem I'd merely ask why they needed it. If they require a tungsten shape, I'd recommend shaping or machining, for instance, depending upon how the shape is. If they merely want a tungsten casting for the sake of wanting a tungsten casting, I'd laugh at them and tell 'em it was impossible as I close the door behind them."

"And your physicist?"

"He wouldn't even consider it. To him,

no real problem exists. He'd have no truck with a production department in the first place, and in the second, shaping metals isn't particularly of interest to a physicist, excepting when the shape itself is important. And then he doesn't give a howling hoot how it gets in that shape as long as it is shaped properly."

"Well, as I see it, you must evolve something that will frustrate the physicist while holding his interest. He must be compelled to consider this insolvable problem by sheer interest alone. It also must be something that you can see no interest in save as a problem for him, otherwise you may find yourself biting your mutual fingernails over your own devilish plan."

"Oh—that's a large order."

"That's it," said Hamilton. "And in the meantime, I'd suggest that you tinker around with some of the stuff you bought. It will lessen the shock of your problem of the hankroll."

"That bank of junk might be the means to his own frustration," grinned Tom. "Every time I look at it, I get a feeling of what can be done about it that is practical, and that may force him into existence and keep him there."

"Well, good luck. And remember, I am just a sort of referee. One of you will become the stronger. One will succeed. I can hope for coalescence, but I doubt that it will take place. Lacking that, all I can hope for is that eventually you will become reintegrated and that the lesser personality will be frozen out."

Tom Lionel returned home, thinking furiously.

"May the best man win, huh?"

It was seven solid weeks by the calendar. Seven solid weeks of hard, backbreaking work during which everything went fine and dandy for Tom Lionel, Consulting Engineer.

The balance of his debt was paid off when Americal Electric purchased the rights and royalties of the cyclotronic spectrograph. The equipment in Tom's laboratory had been kept in good shape, polished and even used occasionally. It was all connected for operation, and though the laboratory had changed from a spacious building into a place where aisles and areas abounded between banks of equipment, it did make an impressive sight.

Even the transit came into use

And then at the end of the seventh

week, Tom Lionel looked at his notebook and started to consider in all of its aspects the rather improbable phenomenon recorded there. He not only let it prey on his mind; he stopped hourly and invited his mind to consider the evidence. At first his mind rejected it on the basis that science was not equipped to consider it, and then as the evidence seemed definite and leading, his mind accepted the fact that this problem did exist and that it was a real and utterly baffling problem.

Then his mind rejected it on the basis of impracticality. It would be nice—but.

No known physical effect could possibly explain it in a satisfactory manner.

Tom went to sleep.

And Thomas Lionel, Ph.D., M.M., awoke. His first consideration was the chessboard. It baffled him. He didn't really think that the engineer would capture his queen. It was too easy. Obviously, there was more to the set-up than appeared. For offering the trap of the double-check and subsequent loss of his queen, Thomas had opened the row blocked by the knight. That left him in the desirable position of capturing the engineer's rook, after which if the engineer was not more than careful in his counterattack, he would find himself staring a checkmate in the face. Either the engineer was blind to the trap, or he had a more complicated trap to snare. Once the physicist started to move in.

He had time. He wanted to consider the whole thing. He was going to be darned sure that he was right before he moved.

He dressed slowly, and as he entered his kitchenette to prepare breakfast, he saw a new notebook on the table. He picked it up, riffled the pages first, and then read the lettering on the front page.

PHYSICAL DATA AND OBSERVATIONS MADE ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE MANIPULATION OF NATURAL FORCES WHICH HAVE NO EXPLANATION IN THE KNOWN REALM OF PHYSICS.

Contents:

- 173 pages of text.
- 77 pages of calculations.
- 48 tables of figures.
- 67 photographs.
- 13 statements made by unbiased—but not trained—observers.
- 7 similar incidents not given scientific attention.

29 graphs and curves,
 25 pages of description and data pertaining to:
 meteorological conditions,
 terran constants—gravity and magnetism,
 sunspot activity,
 chemical analyses of earth at discreet intervals near the occurrence,
 analysis of atmosphere during phenomena.

Accompanying information and data are samples of earth mentioned above. Atmospheric samples were contaminated during analysis and have therefore been destroyed.

"Little Tommy has been a busy lad," mused the physicist. "No explanation, huh? That's a laugh. *Anything* can be explained. Well, my engineering friend, let's see what you have cooked up for me."

Thomas Lionel started to read the "173 pages of text" and got down as far as the bottom of the first page. He blinked, did a double take, and reread it.

"Great howling entropy," he grunted. "The unmitigated screwball has spent weeks in the compilation of data on his own, personal observations of a *poltergeist* in action!"

Thomas took the cigarette case from his pocket and extracted a cigarette. He snapped the lighter and was amazed to see the colors on the case. They were scintillating, iridescent, and beautiful. They danced and changed as he moved the lighter, and the swift play of color across the surface of the case caught his fancy.

It also caught his scientific sense. He looked at the case carefully and swore. Tom had been using the ruling engine. The surface of the cigarette case was a mirror-grating and it was as good a job as the ruling engine could produce.

Thomas fumed. The idea! And then he smiled a bit. For the engineer's use of the ruling engine to decorate a cigarette case was a sort of prostitution of the machine, but it had not harmed the engine in any way. And it was certainly no worse on the physicist's nerves than the irrelevant mixture of precision and utter sloppiness that characterized the physicist's work.

It was, the physicist admitted, beautiful. He returned to the engineering data.

lore and myth. The fearsome manifestation of unrealism. Superstition!

Sheer superstition!

The physicist's mind rejected it, at first. But that which made him the physicist prodded neatly and patiently and quietly. "Where there's smoke, there's fire," it said. And it mentioned situations where, though exact engineering data had not been taken, certainly the observers were not incompetent. They were not trained, but they did attempt to give a valid picture.

Well, so there might be something to it. So the poltergeist might be something.

This case was no flab in the pan. It was real and valid. For nine full days it had persisted. For nine full days, stones passed through the air at the direction of—the poltergeist. Pictures of the stones in full flight. A step-by-step, frame-by-frame sequence picture of a stone leaving the ground and speeding away gave Thomas a wriggly feeling up and down his spine.

Barometric pressure 29.77 inches, temperature 84.66 degrees, both rising slightly. A graph gave the pressure and temperature throughout the nine days. The total number of stones and the masses, individual and aggregate. The district, with a map of both the entire township and a close-up map-diagram of the area, with motion-traces across it, each labeled, notated, numbered, and keyed to the text.

Physical data on the gravitational field. Maps of the magnetic field, both transverse and vertical. Wind direction during each passage of the stones.

A faked report.

Couldn't be real. Absolutely impossible. Ridiculous, and the work of a frantic mind, working avidly to create a situation.

And yet the engineer was a good engineer. He couldn't—it was psychologically impossible for him—to present fake data.

Ergo this report must be real.

Thomas considered the reports of peculiar activity. Mostly the newspapers reported them as small boys throwing stones as a method of exerting their ability to be annoying to the police and duly constituted authority.

There were reports, be knew. About twelve authentic reports per year, which considering the possibility of having the poltergeist phenomena present when no observer was there—how many times had he heard small stones rattling from the

A poltergeist!

The "throwing-ghost" of the ancient

roof or rattling noises of one sort or another—meant that the poltergeist was a rather common phenomenon. There were cases he recalled wherein earthquake temblor had been blamed for the upsetting of a grand piano. He'd wondered about that one—a grand piano is stable, positionwise—and how it could have been rolled across the room and dumped upside down.

Poltergeist phenomena.

Ah yes. It might be advisable to get slightly soused tonight. But Thomas was a physicist. He did not quail or get slightly panicky at the idea of the unknown, even though the unknown was known to have tossed a slab of marble—appropriately, a tombstone—several hundred feet through a baker's shed.

To be sure, it was slightly running against the grain to sit there in the broad daylight and read about things that according to all physics from Archimedes to Einstein claimed impossible, racial superstition, and old wives' tales. It was very disquieting to read of stones—dead, inert, lifeless, immobile bits of granite—that took off from Mother Earth with no visible means of support, to go whizzing through the thin daylight air at speeds that raised bruises, cut nicks in trees, and shattered windows. It bothered the sense of propriety. It was not right. It was like seeing Lake Louise in violent flame, or watching Niagara go tumbling up from the whirling pools to the ledge that flanked Goat Island. It was crushing chrome-vanadium test-bars between your fingers just after removal from a tensile strength machine that failed to fracture them at fifteen thousand pounds per square inch. It was watching phosphorous lying inert in an atmosphere of pure oxygen.

It was all wrong.

And yet, thought the physicist, what must the Ancient One have thought when he considered the act of fire melting hard metal? They did strange things, in those days. They invented phlogiston, and spent centuries trying to isolate it. Galileo and his telescope, looking through it to Jupiter, must have been startled at the concept as well as the sight of a planetary system in operation.

Science knew that the poltergeist was a problem—but like the man who does not care to go crazy because of the insoluble problem, science shrugged, admitted that it was stumped—intelligently enough, under the circumstances—and then remarked that after finding the next

decimal place, it would, perhaps, take a look into the natural phenomena of things that were thrown by nothing.

Until that date, it could look the other way and claim that small boys were throwing stones.

Little boys that they could not see.

Little green men—

Uh-huh, well, here before Thomas Lionel was a veritable wealth of intelligent observations and data on the complete operation, including evidence to substantiate the fact that neither small boys or little green men were involved.

The evidence and engineering measurements were made with impersonal directness. The engineer, recognizing that he knew nothing of the cause, recorded the effect with court-stenographic impartiality. A stone of so many grams left point A in a rising parabola and proceeded to point B where it landed and rolled to point C. It took X seconds, attained Y velocity at peak, and covered Z feet. Graph 1 represents acceleration and deceleration, and equation XXVII is the mathematical representation of the space-curve described by this stone of so many grams.

And bottle VQ contained the stone.

It was all wrong, but it was interesting. It pointed the way to madness—and unless it could be rationalized, the pathway to madness would be a one-way street. Thomas knew at that point that his feet were on that path. He could never retreat until he carried back with him an answer—and from the data presented, his answer must be right.

The engineer, he knew, had done it deliberately. As a means of frustration it was more than airtight. It was perfect. Show a physicist something that floats between two plates, and he'll go crazy until he knows why. And the engineer had shown the physicist any number of things that floated—sped, indeed—through the air between heaven and earth, like Mohammed's coffin.

Without the benefit of mirrors.

Well, Thomas Lionel, are you licked?

He found a letter that removed all doubt as to the reason. He opened it and read:

Dear Archimedes:

Since you so gallantly presented me with this aggregation of things to measure the last three decimal places of everything, I have decided to put it to work. I have had

some fun, thanks to you, in measuring things that I believe have never been set to music before. I have spent some time collecting and presenting data.

This data I do not pretend to understand. I don't intend to try. I am merely an impartial observer. To harness this power would be a boon to civilization. I can see a small truck full of equipment bearing the sign:

POLTERGEIST MOVING COMPANY

if you can only unravel the information contained in my data. You, as a physicist, surely must be able to explain the manifestation in terms that satisfy all and sundry. Once you decide what makes, I'll be interested. Until that date I am stumped, admit it, and happy that I am able to hand the problem to one who by all the evidence, has the personality and character that will not permit these pages of painstaking data to molder in the dust.

Please—old fellow, tell me what's with a poltergeist.

And don't refer vaguely to space warps or fourth dimensional animals. That's strictly for *Corny Stories* or *Vulturesome Tales*.

Interestedly,

Tom Lionel,
Consulting Engineer.

P.S. That junk you bought made it possible to make these measurements. Surely the same stuff should enable you to figure out the answer. You and your monomolecular films.

You and your monomolecular films, Thomas snorted.

That was the start. Then, for eight solid weeks, the laboratory lights burned by night, and the machinery turned at all and odd hours of the clock. Measurements were conducted on all sorts of things; including at one instance, the astronomical data pertaining to planetary line-up of the solar system. That one was stamped with a large reject sign; not only it didn't apply, but it didn't make sense either. Trips to the library were frequent, and many's the ancient tome that Thomas read until his eyes burned.

The equations, graphs, and tabulations came in for their study and he located a percentage of dispersion in

them. It was either experimental error or true dispersion of effect.

The engineer had done his work well. He had compiled his information, and then had presented it in such a manner that left no doubt. And it proved conclusively that something was there and at the same time pointed out that if there was something there, it could be analyzed, and possibly reproduced.

The physicist knew that no answer would be satisfactory until the phenomenon could be reproduced.

And both he and the engineer knew that the chances were more than possible that a high-order physical effect might be the basic cause. An effect for which mankind had no instruments; Radio as a natural phenomenon would be inaccessible to a race that had never discovered a means of detection; the mathematical prediction of radio occurred years before the original experiments.

So—

The physicist set his mind against frustration. To change over to the engineer without an answer would be an admission of defeat. At least without some satisfactory answer.

He mulled his problem by the hour, by the day, and by the week. He did take enough time out to consider the chess problem daily. He figured all the possible moves and finally, one night, he smiled, shrugged his shoulders and decided to plunge ahead.

He slid his rook down from one king row to the other through the square formerly covered by the knight which had been protected by a bishop. All the way across the board he went, and as he arrived at his opponent's king row, he took out the little sign and stood it on the center of the board.

Tom Lionel blinked and removed his finger from the pushbutton. He shook his head. This was all wrong. And, besides, what in the name of entropy was this little box? He didn't recall putting a finger on that button—but here he was, removing his hand after holding the button down.

It was a small metal box about eight by seven by four inches. The edges were all die-straight and the surfaces were as optically flat as Tom could determine without testing. The pushbutton was set flush with the surface, and made of the same metal as the box.

No other projection was evident.

But the button was accompanied with

engraving cut in the metal of the front surface. It said:

BE AN ENGINEER!

Away with imagination! Be practical! Dispense with theory! Do nothing that cannot be justified and explained to perfection.

To succeed; to enjoy the wonderful practicality of the engineer—

PRESS HERE!

Poltergeist Conversion Co., Ltd.

Tom blinked and got the idea at once. The engineer knew. The physicist had dreamed up this thing; it must contain some sort of thing that caused the shift in personality at the physicist's will.

He took hold of it and lifted.

It slipped out of his fingers.

He set both hands on it and lifted. It stayed on the table. He grunted and strained, and succeeded in getting it off the table by several inches. Then he gave up and returned it slowly to the top again, fearing to drop it lest it damage the desk top.

Metal, huh?

What metal?

Tom thought. Must be tougher than a battleship's nose, for if entry were easy, the physicist knew he'd be rebuilding the thing every time he wanted to use it.

He took a cold chisel, set the edge against one corner and walloped it with a hammer. The edge of the cold chisel turned back in a neat Vee. Tom took a file, set the cutting edge against one corner and filed. The file slipped across the corner of the box with all the bite of a solid, slick bar of smooth steel.

An atomic hydrogen cutting torch stood nearby. Tom fired up and set the ultra-hot flame against the same corner that had defied his previous efforts. Nothing much happened excepting that the box got hotter.

That spoiled Tom's fun for the moment. The desk below the box started to smoke and then burst into flame. Tom grabbed a carbon tetrachloride extinguisher but stopped before he played the stream on the hotel metal. It was charring the desk through.

The desk was ruined anyway, so Tom ignored it for the moment. He ran a bucket of water and slid it underneath the desk just in time to catch the ultra-hot box just as it passed through the table.

While it was sizzling in the bucket of water and sending forth great clouds of vapor, Tom busied himself with the extinguisher, putting out the fire on the desk.

Tungsten!

Well, tungsten or not, it must be ruined after immersion in water after being red-hot all over. Nothing on God's green earth—

Holy entropy! He'd said that before. It presented a couple of large, bright red question marks.

One. That thing was apparently tungsten clear through. Therefore, how had the physicist cast it?

Two. Granted that thing had been cast—what in the name of howling rockets had the physicist used for the inside circuits?

And three. If running molten tungsten into the mold hadn't ruined the guts of the box, how could heat and water do anything at all?

And, disquieting thought, was the push-button waterproof?

With much difficulty, Tom moved the box out from its watery bath below the bench and hauled it over to the high-power X-ray machine. He looked at the fluoroscope and grunted in disgust.

Naturally, tungsten would be completely and utterly blank-faced to any X-ray manipulation. He wanted to kick it, but he knew that kicking a solid slab of tungsten would be damaging only to the kicker.

A means of casting tungsten—something that they'd been seeking ever since the stuff was isolated. He had it—or at least, the physicist had it.

Utter frustration.

Thomas Lionel looked at the box and grinned. He knew what had happened. The engineer hadn't been able to guess—

He pressed the button again—

Tom Lionel removed his finger from the button and swore. He used an engineer's ability to remember and then to improvise, and from there he took up the job of invention. His swearing did him good. At least he forgot to worry about the tungsten box. He'd find that one out eventually, anyway.

And, furthermore, its trial by fire and water had damaged it in absolutely no way.

O.E.D., here he was again!

He looked further. It was not like the physicist to just do this. There must be other information pertaining to the

problem that the engineer had left. He went into the living room of his house and sought the desk. There was more of it, anyway.

The title page of the manuscript read:

**MATHEMATICAL ANALYSIS OF
OBSERVATIONAL DATA MADE
DURING THE MANIFESTATION OF
FORCES OPERATING IN A NEW
FIELD OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE.**

By Thomas Lionel, Ph.D., M.M.,
Consulting Engineer.

Tom lifted the manuscript from the desk—

And he got the squeamish feeling of being dropped in an ultra-high speed elevator that was accelerating at a terrific rate. He instinctively dropped the manuscript and clutched the edge of the desk. When the manuscript hit the desk, it caused the phenomenon to stop.

Tom felt the top page, ran around it with his fingers, and then carefully slid his hand beneath the last page, found the button on the desk top, and held it down while he removed the manuscript.

He lifted. It gave him the screaming willies, and instinctively, Tom pressed hard on the button.

His elevator changed direction. It gave him the effect of being hit on the head with a sand bag. It was now accelerating upward at a violent rate.

He let the button up slowly. The feeling ceased as he reached a pressure about even to the weight of the manuscript; stopping all at once. He compensated by dropping an equal number of blank pages from the desk on the button and took the manuscript to his easy chair to read.

It was one of those things. It couldn't be denied. He was going to be forced into presenting this paper before the American Physical Society, using his full name and all of his degrees and the works. The physicist and his little tungsten box would see to it that he remained an engineer until the paper was presented, fully and completely. The physicist didn't have all the answers, of course, but he had solved some of the basic problems.

He finished the manuscript, and then found a letter. It said:

Dear Galileo:

The phenomenon of losing fifty pounds is the result of an antigravity field which I discovered from your data on the good old poltergeist. The trouble with the thing is simply this:

In order to make the thing function, it takes something like three tons of equip-

ment to make the object within the field lose its fifty pounds.

I, as a physicist, do not care about the practicality of the device. I have made it work. You, as an engineer, will appreciate the possibilities behind the perfection of this device. I offer you the chance to start your Poltergeist Moving Company, providing, of course, that you can make something of this effect.

Incidentally, I have been unable to get or to predict antigravitational forces of less than fifty pounds regardless of how the equipment is set up.

I don't care, I will leave the rest to you.

Sincerely,

Thomas Lionel, Ph.D., M.M.

Tungsten casting, antigravity, inefficiency and poltergeists! Tom's head whirled. With a last-hope gesture, he stalked over to the chessboard and studied the men.

It bothered him, he was completely frustrated. The room whirled a bit, despite Tom's fight against it. This was the last straw, this chess game.

Not that he himself was the absolute loser in this game of living chess. It was just that he had started something that threatened to boil over at the edges.

Fundamentally, he'd tried to exorcise the physicist. He'd gone to much trouble and effort to remove the low-down effect of physicist-thinking patterns from his immediate locale. Instead—by his supreme efforts to get rid of the theorist, aforementioned theorist had come up with a few problems of his own that tickled the imagination, offered all sorts of interesting problems, and—

Had basically shown how utterly impossible foolish it would be to try and get rid of the physicist.

Thomas Lionel, Ph.D., M.M., knew too much to be immediately removed, obliterated, canceled, or even ignored.

How do you cast tungsten? How do you make antigravity—even on an inefficient scale? And if a poltergeist is—and you know his address, as the physicist seemed to, can you hire the throwing-ghost? Brother, did he have a lot of problems to reduce to practice! He'd have little time to get rid of his pal.

Tom Lionel snarled at the chessboard. He'd made his gambit, and instead of ridding himself of a rather powerful threat to his own security, he'd—well, he reread the significant sign that presided over the chessboard and began to growl like an insulted cocker spaniel.

The sign said:

CHECKMATE!

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